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SIXTY-THREE POEMS  
A SELECTION



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# SIXTY-THREE POEMS

BY

WILFRID GIBSON

SELECTED FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

BY

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WITH A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

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## INTRODUCTION

OF no contemporary English poet is the Goethean dictum :

‘ Wer den Dichter will verstehen  
Muss in Dichters Lande gehen ’—

more true than of Mr. Gibson. Northumberland is his ‘ country ’ and the source of inspiration of all his poems, save the comparatively few lyrics of intimate experience amid family and friends. Not, however, the Northumberland of border ballad and legend, but that of the present day has fed his poetic experience with scene and incident and character. Hexham, where he was born on October 2nd, 1878, lies in the centre of the extreme south of the county, about ten miles from the Durham border. Two miles above it the North and South Tyne meet, and they run past the north of the town in a single stream due east, among pleasant woods and villages till, in a dozen miles, the river enters the coal area and, for sixteen more, is the Tyne of Newcastle, Wallsend, and North and South Shields. This lower Tyne of pit and forge and industrialism Mr. Gibson has chosen for the rough material wherewith to build much of his poetic world, but he is equally drawn to the North Tyne region, of quite different character, that lies north and north-

west from his birthplace. Here the masses of the Cheviot Hills cover the land for forty miles north to Kirknewton and an equal distance north-west to the trans-border town of Hawick, and are drained by the Coquet, the Rede, and the North Tyne. A land of solitary farms first, then of still more solitary shepherds' hovels, this great sweep of wild country in which pre-industrial Northumberland lives on, attracts his genius as strongly as the former region of modern labour.

Finally, he has added the North Sea coast, 30 miles eastward, and its fisher-perils to his demesne, and so enclosed a space of human life in which working folk of moor, and farm, and city, and sea combine to reveal plain humanity at its task, moulding character and deciding destiny while it wins its livelihood in the ways ancient and modern that are the bases of human existence.

Among such scenes and people Mr. Gibson lived his first 34 years, and, though he has lived away from them a further dozen years and more, they are still the matrix of his poetic creation. He moved to London in 1912, staying there only a few months, and, since his marriage, he has lived for periods in the midlands of England and now resides in Pembrokeshire, a county of certain similarities—coal and iron, pasture and moorland—with his northern home.

His life he describes as 'unremarkable,' since no outstanding incidents distinguish it, save the births of his three children and the publication of his books. At the outbreak of war he offered himself for active service, and after being several times rejected for

the army, served as a private in the A.S.C. from 1917.

He has travelled both East and West, has seen

‘A blue-black Nubian plucking oranges  
At Jaffa by a sea of malachite  
In red tarboosh, green sash, and flowing white  
Burnous,’—

‘The blind white oblivion of noon-skies’ in Egypt and ‘Bronzed hills of oak that sweep up to Carrara’s peaks of snow’ in the Old World, and in the New has watched America at work and play while his mind stayed with his own people at home or in the trenches.

Yet, like Browning after his Russian journey nearly a century ago, Mr. Gibson seems to find travel bring him no nearer to the end of the poet’s search. The wonders of nature make a passing appeal, variations among men are a mask obscuring the secret of his being, which to know is life indeed.

‘Atlantic and Pacific I have sailed,  
And sojourned in old cities of Cathay,  
Icy Himalayas and stark Alps I’ve scaled,  
And up great golden rivers thrust my way  
Through crass, green, acrid, ominous dripping night  
Of Senegambia ; over the still snows  
Of Polar lands flushed with unfading rose  
Of the rayless sun’s cold, clipped, unkindling light,  
Through the great Canyon’s twilight mystery,  
And over Arizona’s sand and stone,  
I travel the round world unceasingly,  
Unresting, unaccompanied and apart :  
Yet never may I pierce the dark unknown  
And undiscovered country of my own heart.’

It is the object of this introduction, first, to treat Mr. Gibson's works in chronological order—the date of writing being preferred, where it is discoverable, to that of publication—and second, to attempt to place his work among contemporary poets and judge the qualities by virtue of which it may expect to live. Though 'Stonefolds' stands first in order of publication among the volumes which Mr. Gibson has allowed to remain to represent him, 'Akra the Slave' will be considered before it, being written in 1904, and then the few poems rescued from a withdrawn volume of 1905 and republished, fifteen years later, at the end of 'Neighbours.'

According to the foreword poem, 'Akra the Slave' was written as an imaginative consequence of a journey to the Near East. Contact with the East is wont to affect the gray and analytic Northern mind in two ways, to flood it with colour, since the sun is really seen for the first time, and to stimulate its narrative powers, for the East is the home of storytelling, and all the greatest stories of the world have their origins or counterparts there.

Mr. Gibson received both these experiences. The thousand lines and more of 'Akra the Slave' are by far his most sustained effort in narrative form and, not so much in separable passages as throughout the whole work, colour, in description of forest and desert and the marvels of old Babylon abounds—it is a poem that appeals, first and foremost, to the eye. The story is, briefly, that of an Eastern of vague nationality, a youth naturally content with the alternate spurts and laziness of life in his forest home,

who is captured, along with his brothers and sisters, by slave-raiders and driven westward through leagues of jungle, mountain and desert to Babylon. A dream before the city walls prepares him for the sight of the Queen—

‘The moon-pale brows, o’er which the clustered  
hair  
Hung like the smoke of torches, ruddy gold,  
Against a canopy of peacock plumes ;  
The deep brown, burning eyes,  
From which the soul looked on me in fierce  
pity ’—

and the actual sight of her decides him to choose life, so that he may serve her, rather than the death that his shame at slavery craved. He carries clay, works at furnaces, makes bricks, is found one day drawing animal-forms and promoted to the decorating of the palace-walls, then to gem-cutting—the Queen ever before his mind. A golden serpent, that he fashions, he is allowed by the King to carry to her. She rises and sets it in her hair, and her momentary look of kindness strikes through him and he turns and flees—

‘And, still through many days  
Although I did not look again  
Upon those dreaming eyes,  
Their visionary light  
Within my soul, revealed eternity.’

Later, after working on a porphyry garland in the hanging gardens of the palace, he sleeps, overstaying his time, till the forbidden afternoon hours and,



waking, sees the Queen, and now, not merely her beauty but, as she lifts up her eyes unseeing,

‘ her soul  
Unveiled in naked immortality,  
Untrammelled by the trappings of brief time  
And cloaks of circumstance,’

takes hold upon him ; he has attained the ultimate vision. It is actual gain, then, that he should be discovered by the King at that moment and dragged away to die on the morrow.

The importance of ‘ Akra the Slave ’ lies, not in the visual truth of its descriptions, nor even in the dramatic moment chosen—the hours just before the execution—for its recital, but in the poem being, in the same way as ‘ Endymion,’ ‘ Alastor,’ or ‘ Pauline,’ the formation of a young poet’s dream of the beauty that is ideal to him, of his search for it, and his experiences in the quest, baffled or attaining. It is Mr. Gibson’s one voyage into ideal realms, producing a poem utterly unlike the rest of his work and yet the necessary counterpart of the rest. We see here the poet-soul, bound to circumstance, a slave to necessity, yet living wholly for the vision of divine perfection. The poet and beauty are the slave and the Queen, that are brought together in those lines of aesthetic paradox in ‘ On the Embankment,’ in ‘ Thoroughfares,’ ten years later,—

‘ My heart is a sunlit, windy sail ;  
My heart is a hopeless lad in gaol.’

All-compelling beauty on the one hand, adverse

fate and inherent frailty on the other constitute the artist's life-experience, the systole and diastole of his heart.

The five poems generally entitled 'Salvage' being in his earliest lyric manner are interesting, apart even from their intrinsic merit, for the study of the poet's development. 'My early passion,' he says,<sup>1</sup> 'was for Shelley and Swinburne, and my *conscious* ambition to be a lyric poet,' and here both the conscious ambition and something of the formal traditions under which he learnt his verse-craft are apparent. All five poems are lyrical monologues in the manner which the chief Victorian poets had created and made their own. One, 'The Lambing,' is in the measure of Swinburne's 'Hymn to Proserpine,' the six-foot iambic-anapæstic couplet earlier used by Tennyson in the first section of 'Maud' and by Browning in 'Abt Vogler'; another, 'The Arrow,' is in the 'In Memoriam' metre, while two more have that same rhythm and rhyme-scheme but with an added foot, one of the poems being as richly alliterative and onomatopœic as a Victorian could desire; the fifth poem is in the old septenary, arranged in the familiar 'common metre.'

In these traditional bottles, however, Mr. Gibson's new wine is already fermenting. All the subjects have his characteristic country atmosphere, two relating to shepherds and one to haymakers; the 'crises' that belong to lyrical monologues are stated by the narrative method that is to become usual with him, the dramatic point appearing near the

<sup>1</sup> In a letter of 7th April, 1925, to the Editor.

end in a way that is peculiarly distinctive of his work.

'Stonefolds,' however, published in 1907, presents six dramatic scenes in blank verse, of a simplicity that in no way recalls Victorian poets and with subjects altogether outside their range. The poet has found himself; the conscious ambition has been set aside by a deeper unconscious need of expression, the nature of the poetic experience has rejected the lyric forms, which the poet had lived among, in favour of the great dramatic one, because this alone was fitted to give artistic life to his peculiar vision, which is for climaxes of human experience, those moments when one or two mortals are raised to the highest pitch their natures can attain and there face the deepest mysteries of life, know the extremes of joy or pain.

Mr. Gibson's genius is essentially dramatic. His sensibility is for the angles and corners of life, where two strata of feeling in one person run together at the surface of expression or where two conflicting personalities meet. In either case, a clash occurs of what may be called internal actions, of emotions that run counter to each other and will not allow each other to be expressed in entirety and freedom. This conflict is the basis of poetic experience, and it is here that the poet is at one with the rest of the world, hereon that he and mankind in general base their understanding of each other. For all life may be felt or viewed as conflict, not necessarily or merely between moral good and evil, but also between equal but contradictory goods, such as Orestes felt between reverence

for his father and love for his mother who had murdered that father, or between passions which appear to be irreconcilable, such as grief for the dying and joy in their immortality, as in Wordsworth's 'Lines written on the approaching death of Fox,' or as love for a woman and desire for death in Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci.' In all these the poetic distinguishes itself from similar experiences, such as the religious or philosophic, by receiving a purely human impression of the crisis of life without that predominantly moral preoccupation which is the mark of religion, or that purely intellectual vision which is the jealous care of philosophy.

In the poetic experience, then, the whole man takes part, and emotion, will and understanding function equally and harmoniously in absorbing what life gives, and converting it again into food for more life and wider, and there is no preoccupation with moral values, though these are represented in poetry also by their purely emotional and intellectual relations.

The dramatic type of the poetic mind, further, is fitted peculiarly for apprehending crisis or climaxes of human experience produced by conflicting currents in the mind. These currents may be in conflict in one person at a single time, and will then issue in dramatic monologue or lyric. The classic example of the former is Hamlet, a study of whose monologues in their contexts will show that they arise at points in the play, when the Prince reaches mental crises, caused by the entrance of a contrasting emotion into a mind already burdened with strong feeling—thus the monologue 'Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave

am I,' bursts from him, when sympathy with the fictitious rage of the actor at Priam's death collides with the real, but listless, suffering at his own father's murder.

Of the dramatic lyric Browning is the acknowledged master, and 'A Last Ride Together' may be taken as representative of the type, a poem resolving the conflict in the lover's mind between two apparently irreconcilable conditions, that of losing the woman who has rejected his love, and of possessing her for ever.

It is conflicts such as these that are the high lights—if one may borrow a term from the technique of painting—of common life, the crises where individual character reveals itself most completely and with the sharpest definition, and which may occur to any man or woman, which, therefore, all can enter into and understand. Thus it is that dramatic 'moments' offer the best field for understanding between poet and reader or spectator and, at the same time, the greatest range combined with the greatest vividness for artistic creation by the poet.

For the poetic experience, which is common to all men, is one thing; the power to give that experience permanence in artistic form is the gift of the born artist alone, and in the medium of language, of the born poet alone. Anyone may experience conflicting emotions, the poetic gift alone can resolve the conflict, and also express the resolution in terms of permanent beauty which shall satisfy both the poet and humanity.

The poet, then, has a double task before him, one of

which is both therapeutic and aesthetic at the same time. In the conception of a poem he has the task of resolving a conflict, or bringing order out of the chaos of human life; in the composition of the poem, which proceeds in his mind *pari passu* with its conception, he has to endow that resolution, that mental and spiritual order, with the permanence of beautiful form. The former aspect of the task is therapeutic in that it is the poetic method of settling the incongruities and healing the strife of life; the latter is aesthetic not only in the beauty of form—of verse-technique and diction which it receives,—but also in the deeper and earlier-ordained beauty of ordered and chastened feeling and thought.

For the sake of intellectual clarity, the two aspects may be considered apart from each other, though always with the mental reservation that separation between content and form is illegal in art.

Of the six scenes in 'Stonefolds,' the last may serve as an example of Mr. Gibson's vision of the dramatic resolution of conflicts in life.

'On the Threshold,' represents the first morning of married life of Philip and Alice Ridley. The shepherd's cottage on the fells, which they have come into was the abode of a pair, William Hall and his wife, who had lived in hate of each other for sixty years, after brief passion, and had cast out their daughter Ellen when she was abandoned by the man above her station in life whom she loved. Here tragedy impends, in that Alice Ridley, practical and sensible, rebuffs her young husband's tenderness and, when the Halls' history is matter

for talk between her and Philip, asserts that she would treat any sinning child of her own as they treated Ellen. The history of love's death and the succeeding bitterness is on the way to repeat itself in a new form in the successors of the Halls. From this tragedy Alice is saved, after her husband's departure to work. Ellen Hall appears on the cottage threshold and Alice's heart opens to her, so that, encouraged, Ellen tells of the power of her love and what it has meant to her through years of dark existence in city slums.

Philip, returning when Ellen has gone, finds a new glory in Alice's eyes. To her Ellen's love, unaffected by treachery and the loss of all, has given a new meaning to her own, so fortunate in every circumstance, and the future is no longer a winter that may 'freeze the springs of love,' but 'All the happy years that you and I must travel side by side.'

In form, 'Stonefolds' contains few lines of marked beauty. The order of nature which is its reconciling force, requires a philosophy of nature to glorify it and that Mr. Gibson had not when the scene was written. 'On the Threshold,' however, reveals beauty of execution again and again—

'They don't know love, who have not starved for  
love,  
And worked their fingers to the bone for love,  
And lived for love, without love's recompense,  
Death holding within easy reach the while  
The escape and solace of forgetfulness'—

though Alice's change of attitude to life is insufficiently motivated.

'Daily Bread' (1910), turns from countryside subjects to slum-tenements, pit- and fishing-villages. The poet, as his preluding poem sings, has been lured out to the high seas of human life—

'Through whose unresting conflict, day and night  
Surges the dauntless human harmony.'

The tragedies are caused by fatal accidents on sea and railway, in mine and forge, which strike wives and mothers and bring out their heroic endurance, even to death; the young pitman's resolve, unalterable by mother or sweetheart, to stay by his job and his mates who once saved him from death; the steady faith of women, that upholds their men through the bitterness of unemployment, or the eighteen hours day of the farm labourer; all this sheer courage among hard-labouring people is isolated, in sixteen scenes for study. For representation is chosen always the moment of supreme crisis, wherein the speakers, shaken out of their usual reticence or stoicism, reveal the sufferings they have known or are now faced with, and the only comfort in all—for there is no 'higher' explanation given, no philosophy of pain—is to be found in the temper of the human spirit so revealed.

In 'Stonefolds' and 'Daily Bread' the form of expression employed had been that of full drama, several persons being represented and the internal action expressed in dialogue. Each action is set in motion by Mr. Gibson in either of two ways, either by a preceding event, which now bears fruit in spiritual crisis, as when sunstroke recalls to the aban-



doned mother the infant she had killed in thought, though not in deed, in 'The House of Candles,' or by a catastrophe during the piece which precipitates a crisis already prepared for or feared, as in 'The Shirt,' which Caroline Alder is making for her son William, but which his betrothed, Isabel Grey, has a premonition he will never wear. It is noticeable that in neither case does the event take place upon the stage which the dramatic form presupposes.

In every piece a situation purely psychological is prepared for or explained by characters and then worked out to an inevitable solution. There is no inherent reason for the appearance of several persons, save the advantage of regarding the crisis from several angles of vision. When there are only two such angles, much force is gained by the poet presenting the crisis in dramatic narrative, and when the conflict can be sufficiently apprehended through one mind alone, the proper form becomes that of dramatic monologue. Such crises as occur in the lives of working folk,—feud, peril, illness or accident, sudden death,—which bring simple lives to a culmination, these two dramatic forms appear to present more vividly and effectively than the full drama.

So Mr. Gibson, at least, seems to have discovered, for in 'Fires' (1912) similar conditions and actions to those in 'Daily Bread' are related by the poet himself in dramatic narrative, or by the 'persona patiens' himself in dramatic monologue. The superior effect so obtained won also general recognition, for this was the volume that first brought Mr. Gibson fame. Characteristic of dramatic narrative

is 'The Brothers,' in which Robert and Dick, pit-lads and brothers, work in the shaft side by side in bitter hatred, expressed in recriminations about the work, but never about the girl whom both want. Just when the strain has overmastered Dick and he rushed on Robert with his pick in reply to a gibe, the roof falls, strikes Robert down and entombs both men. A revulsion of feeling restores brotherly feeling in Dick, and it is the poet's task to trace, in described action and in two short whispered speeches, Dick's conquest of jealousy and the reconciliation of the two before the deadly choke-damp kills them.

Of the dramatic monologue there are four examples out of twenty-one poems in 'Fires,' proving it to be the much less favoured form. None of them attains either the poetic richness and power of the half-dozen best narratives, though 'Red Fox' shows tenseness in depicting the passion for murder changed into pity, and 'The Hare' a peculiar visionary quality in the similar dark terror in the eyes of a hare escaped from the trap and of a gipsy girl at the sight of a loathed suitor, and in the disappearance of that look in her eyes, when the love of the youth who speaks turns her life to freedom and a golden hope.

The new forms in 'Fires' are accompanied by new metres. Blank verse disappears along with the purely dramatic form to which English usage has wedded it, and rhyme enters into all the 21 poems. In two of these only, however, is it employed in any regular sequence—in 'The Wife' as couplets, with three triplets interspersed, and in 'Red Fox' in 6-lined stanza *ababab*. In the overwhelming majority

of 19 poems, Mr. Gibson interlaces rhymes with such complication that any regularity of scheme, save here and there for a few lines at a time, is lost. The purpose of this is definite and masterly, and is related intimately with the other aspect of his versification in this volume, viz., line-length—for the foot he uses is always iambic. Every length of line from 2 feet to 5 feet is used, and, in 14 poems, in some combination with each other. Thus, two poems are in 5-foot lines with a few 4-foot lines interspersed in sets of three and four, and in one case, of ten lines; seven poems, excluding the regular ones mentioned above, are in 4 feet, five of them without an exceptional line, two with a few 2- and 3-foot lines interspersed. The remaining ten poems show combinations of lines from 2 feet to 5 feet (4 poems), 3-5 feet (2 poems), 2-4 feet (3 poems) and 3-4 feet (1 poem). In all these 19 poems the rhyme-arrangement and line-length are made to weave a pattern such that the emotional swing of each 'story,' from narrative to dramatic and back again, is reproduced in rhythm and echo, and even lyrical effects, such as triplet and identical rhymes as refrains, are caught where the emotion is lingering and mystical. 'Flannan Isle,' deservedly considered the finest in the book, and one of Mr. Gibson's greatest achievements, combines most of these effects in itself. It is written in lines of 3-4 feet, but has one 2-foot couplet; the first 30 lines, set in three paragraphs—almost stanzas—of 4 lines each and two of 9, show 12 rhymes in the following arrangement:

*abcb | cddb | bccb | abbbffbag | higjibjbb |*

grouped as the bars show, one rhyme being repeated 12 times, carrying thus the burthen of the poem in a chain through its opening passage—here extended, there in concentrated weight.

'Thoroughfares' (1914) is remarkable for containing almost the first published lyrics of Mr. Gibson, and for a visionary quality clearly akin to dreams, and seen hitherto only in 'foreword' poems. In its plainest form this quality appears as a nightmare, represented as the poet's own, or as a delirious dream, such as that of the sea-depths seen by the carter of 'Solway Ford' crushed by his own cart-wheel and left helpless, or of wheels, in the poem of that name, that tortures or comforts the policeman stricken on point duty. In others of the poems, memories or emotions of childhood are recalled with visionary power; sometimes, again, it is a moment of mystic sight, as when a youth's bright hair in a restaurant calls up the sons of the morning singing for joy, or of wish-fulfilment in dream, as when violin music sweeps the city-clerk away to the sea. Every one of the sixteen narratives in the volume is built upon a dream experience such as these, and the delirium visions are described with peculiar force and vividness. Pure vision raised to objective reality appears in 'The Vixen,' where the last huntsman and few hounds to stay the chase ride down the dead-beat quarry and yet lose her as a passing squall of snow hides the animal and reveals in her place a girl with the vixen's red hair and white fangs.

The first volume after Mr. Gibson's removal from Northumberland carries the reader back to his home

country, and just to that part of it which the poet had hitherto left untouched.

'Borderlands' (1914) consists of three poems in dialogue form, but having nothing further in common with drama than that and the crisis of experience which is never absent from Mr. Gibson's work. Each presents a contrast of point of views between two persons with regard to a human matter that is at the moment concerning both. 'Queen's Crag' sets the elderly, conveniently married man's point of view of passion against the idealising youth's; 'Bloody-bush Edge' the Londoner thief's against the Northumbrian poacher's; 'Hoops,' the view of success in life of a cripple who cannot fulfil himself against that of the normal man whose own strength is beginning to pass, but who has sons. All these poems are unrhymed, the first in lines of 2-5 feet, the second and third in blank verse.

Remarkable are two things, that the romance of the Border country of Northumbria enters Mr. Gibson's work just when he has left that region and not before, and also that tragedy is absent, supplanted by a milder mood, which still feels the oppositions of life, not as conflicts that tear the soul, but as varieties of human experience.

The early months of the War saw the drafting of tens of thousands of Englishmen from civilian ranks into the army. Men gave up suddenly pursuits they had been bred up to or occupied in for years, broke away from plough and byre, counter and office and workshop in answer to England's need, with only the visionary hope of ever returning to the settled

occupation that their minds had grown accustomed to think of as life. They tore themselves away also from family-circles, and from what is only less dear to an Englishman's heart, sports and games, and were plunged into the totally alien conditions of war in Flanders.

It was an inevitable psychological consequence that in any given soldier of the New Army two men should live side by side—the labourer or the counter-jumper of normal life and the soldier that he tried and was drilled to be. A conflict might thus occur at any time between the old and the young personalities within him, or an incident on the field might raise a vision recalling home to him.

Contrariwise, when field-experiences tried the active mind beyond endurance, it might cease to function, and the older and deeper self would come forth and live, projecting such living pictures of home on to the screen of existence that the soldier forgot his present environment entirely till the conscious mind was restored and able to take over again the business of living. In extreme cases, shock finally overturned regular consciousness and a madness supervened which often took the form of return to childhood and home scenes, wherein the tortured mind found that peace and stability which the war had destroyed.

Such are the mental situations, pregnant with strong emotional possibilities, that Mr. Gibson's dramatic sense and sympathy naturally attached themselves to, and in 'Battle' (1915) we have presentations, all short and sharp, save one, because

war's crises, when they take place, are catastrophic. The one longer poem, 'Between the Lines,' is a study in greater breadth of the one slow situation of war, other than that of captivity, viz. wounded helplessness in 'No Man's Land.'

It is almost superfluous to say that Mr. Gibson's handling is always radical and fearless, and his expression succinct and as unsentimental as war itself. Again there is no answer offered to the problem of pain. The plain man, with the certainty of death every moment before him, feels—

' Life or death, 'twas luck  
From first to last, and you'd just got to trust  
Your luck and grin. It wasn't so much pluck  
As knowing that you'd got to, when needs must,  
And better to die grinning '—

which cheerful fatalism was the living faith of the English soldiery, bred their peculiar heroism and created in moments of horror or intense fear, the equilibrium which Mr. Gibson's artistry catches with such perfection—

He'd even have his joke  
While we were sitting tight  
And so he needs must poke  
His silly head in sight  
To whisper some new jest  
Chortling, but as he spoke  
A rifle cracked . . .

And now God knows when I shall hear the rest ! '

'Friends' (1916) is inscribed to the memory of Rupert Brooke, and it would seem as if the passing of the great poet-friend had thrown Mr. Gibson back

upon himself to spend time among the resources of his life and to find distraction in memories of travel or in grotesques. The four humorous grotesques, conceived, if Ruskin is right, in the lethargy of an artist's life consequent on great strain, reveal a new playfulness in the poet, and at the same time recall Mr. de la Mare's elvishness, just as The ' Whisperers ' in ' Thoroughfares ' recalls the same poet's eeriness, just sufficiently to indicate that the two poets have similar pockets of experience from which they could fish coloured marbles for a boy's game together or ghost-stories for the fire-side, if they cared.

The glory of the volume are the seventeen sonnets which compose half its contents. All but two of them are written in the Petrarchan form, with entire mastery of that form's paucity and intricacy of rhymes and the use of the octave for statement and the sestet for reflection. Of the four inexpressibly beautiful sonnets bearing the title ' Home,' two, the first and fourth, appear with an octave scheme—*abccbadd*—entirely new, we believe, in English literature, a system of three distinct rhymes, reversed, and followed by a couplet that appears to succeed entirely and gives a new music to the oldest sonnet form.

The opening four sonnets to Rupert Brooke, embalming four experiences shared by the poets, give vignettes of the poet that verify the impression that Brooke's poems give of a spirit as virile as Byron's, and a passion for beauty as warm as that of Keats. No purer poetry has ever come from Mr. Gibson's pen than the final three lines that project a memory of an afternoon



spent in the garden of Rupert Brooke's Old Vicarage, Grantchester, with an eternal future of homely and poetic contrast—

‘And Styx for you may have the ripple and gleam  
Of your familiar river, and Charon's bark  
Tarry by that old garden of delight.’

A prefatory note to ‘Livelihood’ (1917), by the poet, states that ‘most of the poems in this volume were imagined, and the greater part of them written, before August 1914, but the war has inevitably modified my original conception of the series as a whole.’ That original conception, contained in a foreword poem ‘To Audrey,’ was to bring together for his little daughter some of the ‘friendly folk her father knew,’ so that, reading the book one day, she may overhear—

‘As once I overheard,  
These men and women talking to themselves.’

‘And so find out how they faced life and earned,  
As you one day must earn, a livelihood,  
And how, in spite of everything, they learned  
To take their luck through life and find it good.’

The conception, then, was by a return to the dramatic narrative method of ‘Fires,’ to present, but more fully and maturely, the fortunes of working life of town and country and sea, the moment of expression being again a crisis in the life that throws its elemental nature to the surface and exposes also the grim pragmatism of mind of the plain working Englishman and woman, the unfailing

response of each, despite mortal peril and suffering, to the primary calls of love, duty, honour of brother and friend, lifelong memory and mercy. This is the theme of sixteen of the twenty poems, nearly all gems of Mr. Gibson's narrative work.

Using, normally, decasyllabic lines, rhyming in couplets or in quatrains *abab* or *abba*, but in four poems in octosyllabics, he both lays bare the soul and traces the life-fortune of cattle-drover, servant-girl, country doctor, plate-layer, orchestra-fiddler, small business-men, piper-shepherd, pitman, and lighthouse keeper. Boys, women, men of all ages and many labours record the struggles of their souls and find the interpretation of their hard and hazardous lives in the plain, but nervous and finished, verses of this greatest of Mr. Gibson's poetic efforts. If there is one volume more representative of his domestic work than the others it is 'Livelihood.'

Four poems, by internal evidence, belong to the war-period. One of these, 'Between the Lines,' is the single narrative of 'Battle' transferred here to a place among its peers. The other three—'The News,' 'Daffodils' and 'Strawberries'—fulfil 'Battle' by setting in cameo-relief intense moments in the lives of non-combatants—the young wife whose amazing secret of motherhood is left unwhispered because her man is abstracted, dumb from the decision that he must go and fight; the jobbing crock-mender, thrown out of work by the war, but united with his son at the front by the simple link that they both can see a joke; the mother picking strawberries through

the hot day, whose whole heart and mind are with her husband in the trenches.

'Whin' (1918) is a collection of short lyric poems written, no doubt, at various times during the six years between the poet's departure from Northumberland and its date of publication. It wears a general reminiscent cast and gathers up a multiplicity of nature impressions, legends, superstitions and living figures that make the book almost a poetic chronicle of Northumbrian mood and story. It is not, however, the obvious that receives treatment—from the immense wealth of Border legend that seems to offer the most poetic material not one tale. The nearest approach that Mr. Gibson will allow himself to such glamour is to catch the echo of a duel of spirit horsemen in 'Clattering Ford' repeating for ever on moonlit nights an old deed of blood and vengeance; perhaps also the night rider in 'Candle Gate' may be a Border figure, though he might just as well be Death. Half a dozen poems, however, are creations that recall the old ballads, poems built on themes such as the avengers' chase of a murderer, the runaway marriage of the Parson's seventh daughter with a gipsy, the hopeless lover's night-walks that end in death to him. Several more centre upon folk-superstitions that are dark as the earth they are born of, and concern misfortune and black magic and ill-luck, or upon folk-stories of hanged men or marriages of January with May that combine mystery with gloom.

Most of the poems, however, bring a nearer and more real Northumberland to mind. The heights

and dales and streams of the Cheviots are there, dressed in their seasons and in the play of light and shade, or affecting the mind by sound and sight, or appearing in dreams of home to soldiers in Flanders. Separation or loss in the war connect themselves readily in the memories of those left in the home-country with trysts and homesteads and journeys together, and when Mr. Gibson connects these with magical names like Unthank, Dinlabyre and Love-lady Shield, these poems promise and by his genius give the most powerful results. Finally, the wandering figures on the roads and moors are caught in the net of cords—the fiddler or crowder who plays at festivals and greetings at the great farms, the pedlar and the mugger, the huntsman and even the time-served convict who finds the moors too cold and wide and is smitten with nostalgia for Northleach gaol. Pure lyrics there are too, like ‘Muggleswick,’ ‘Thirlwall’ and ‘Witch’s Linn,’ where objectivity fades almost away and places are wholly combined with states of soul.

Seven groups of poems form together the volume called ‘Neighbours’ (1920). When the last group, ‘Salvage,’ which has been treated at the beginning of this account, is excluded, the remainder fall naturally into two sets—one consisting of two groups of poems reminiscent entirely of Northumbrian folk, the other of events, experiences, moods from the poet’s own life, apart from his native country. Such a division would seem to suggest a dramatic group on the one hand, a lyric on the other, but the characteristic peculiarity of Mr. Gibson’s genius, that poetic vision

comes at the moment when a memory cuts into a contrasting state of mind, endows the lyrical work also with dramatic force, the state of mind which a given lyric describes being rendered pregnant with movement and change. One group of the Northumbrian poems calls to life peasantry and townsfolk, singly or in pairs, in the dramatic lyric or in the hitherto new form of brief dialogue. 'Neighbours' they are, not only to each other, but to him, for he knows the queer angles and dark corners of their lives, as obscure to themselves as to the heedless world. Here chances common to many married lives are made visible in a single moment by dialogue or monologue or by the poet's person—as the spurt and brief flame of a match half reveals a dark room and gives the eye just time to seize upon one object with fair clearness and guess the general lie and appearance of the rest—or single folk are caught by the poet-eye in acts characteristic of their whole nature.

'Casualties,' likewise, presents moments in the poet's experience concerning Northumbrians, but in their death as soldiers in the Great War. The thirteen poems, one for each man, are far from being epitaphs, though they are to commemorate the gift of plain warriors' lives for the peace of the coming world. The commemoration is achieved by seizing the permanent relation between the dead soldier's life and that of the world to which he once belonged, between Alan Gordon and the roses whose glowing names he loved, Martin Akenshaw and the scent of the elder, Ralph Straker and snow, Noel Dark, killed in Gallipoli, and the Helen he created in bronze.

These men, representations of so many conditions of Northumbrian life, are immortalised thus in crafts and labours, or in cycles of nature that will know no end as long as the world lasts.

The four groups of poems of the other set present instances of poetic vision received either in war-experiences (In Khaki) or among foreign scenes (Travels), from the circles of intimates (Home) or from scattered sources of life, both reality and dream (Chambers). The poems which are the results of vision may be described as normally happy when related to home, normally painful, or at best wistful, when related to the world outside or earlier times, those poems in 'Travels' which depend for their inspiration on an inrush of home upon foreign experience belonging, of course, to the former description. Pleasure in either poetic result, the quickening from pleasure or pain, is enhanced here by the revelation of the manner of poetic illumination in the two poems, the title-piece 'Chambers,' and 'Windows' in 'Travels.' Here, in the former, the poet views his mind as a maze of unlit corridors running between chambers, with shut doors that, touched singly by a living ray, burst open to reveal either terror or beauty, sometimes two neighbouring doors swinging open together to show 'Beauty and terror together in the night.' Intuitive apprehension, or in default of that gift, close study of this poem gives the key not only to this volume of poetic experiences, but to all Mr. Gibson's work, so far as psychological insight can assist in the appreciation of poetry.

In the two sonnets, 'Windows,' a particular instance

of the experience appears, when a window in Worcestershire, opening out on a sunset of sheer loveliness, calls up in the memory another window overseas which, while the poet slept, had looked out blindly on the murder of a girl. The poet is troubled by the half-seen mystery of relation that the mind thus establishes of itself between things that to the reason and to common experience contrast so sharply as to appear unrelated. But if poetic inspiration has any value or truth, the unity of all life which it indicates in flashes to chosen minds, such as the poet's, must be the deepest verity, though seizable perhaps only by imagination, but a verity so final and all-illuminating that if the poet could live always in its light, he could achieve entire serenity. As it is, his fitful inspiration drives him from one discovery of beauty or terror along a blind path to the next.

'Krindlesyke' (1922) is a dramatic poem in two books, representing three generations of life in the lonely Northumbrian shepherd's hut that gives its name to the whole and acts as a presiding deity over the fortunes and destinies of its inhabitants.

Book I, 'Phoebe Barrasford,' is an early dramatic scene of the period and type of those in 'Daily Bread,' remodelled some ten years later. The Barrasfords, who have possessed and been possessed by Krindlesyke for a generation or two, are now represented by the blind decrepit herd Ezra, his elderly wife Eliza and six sons, five of whom have abandoned the home. The youngest, Jim, is that day being married, and Ezra is surprised to learn it is not to Judith Ellershaw, who fled one night from her father's house. Before

Jim arrives with his bride, Phoebe Martin, Judith herself appears in distress with a babe, seeking a moment's shelter and food. The scene turns on the general discovery that Jim is the babe's father and closes with Phoebe carrying Judith and the babe off to live with her.

Book II., 'Bell Haggard,' presents in Part I. a scene three months later. Jim has fled Krindlesyke, but first broken into his father's box under the bed and carried off the hoarded money. The shock of the theft and the loss of her last son overcomes Eliza Barrasford, and when Peter, who had disappeared twelve years since, returns with his gipsy mate, Bell Haggard, to rob the box, they find the mother dead. Superstitious fear of a dead woman's curse holds Bell to the house and she takes over control, binding Peter to it with her will, till their six-year son Michael is old enough to mind the sheep.

Part II. reveals life fifteen years later. Ezra is dead, Peter fled nine years earlier. Bell is still in command and Michael has grown up into a steady man. Judith Ellershaw appears, and she and Bell discover that Michael is wooing Judith's daughter Ruth. Bell has waited these years for another woman to take her place, and when Michael and his bride appear, nothing will keep her from the old gipsy life.

Part III. advances again six years. Judith is installed as grandmother in Krindlesyke, minding the babe while Michael and Ruth are at the fair with the other two boys. Jim appears after twenty years, hunted for some crime, and attempts first to win Judith to let him stay at Krindlesyke, then to force



her to go with him for his comfort. He has got her consent by threats when Bell appears in the doorway and frightens him out of the house by talk of hanging and of men on his track. Bell, going out later, is attacked by Jim in the dark and stumbles back to Krindlesyke to die. She is laid out by Judith, as Bell herself had laid Eliza out twenty-one years earlier. Michael and Ruth return to hear the news and from their children's talk it is apparent that little Ralph is to be the solid shepherd of his father's pattern, while Nicholas has the gipsy-blood of his grandmother Bell.

The unity of the pieces depends, on the one hand, on the power of Krindlesyke to bind the women that enter there to keep it and its menfolk. Eliza and Ruth, entering as brides, wear out their whole lives in this service. Bell and Judith coming in by side-ways, are bound just as much and, sharply-contrasted though they are—one being gipsy and one home-born—they are treated alike by the old cottage as its natural pillars. On the other hand, the action depends on mysteries of heredity. Ezra had been hot-blooded and almost by chance had married Eliza rather than one of the many others he had known. Eliza has suffered his coarse and venomous tongue and all her six sons have taken after their father's worst characteristics, goaded to do so by his harshness to them. Peter is a tramp, Jim a thief and pithless. Phoebe dies within a year of Jim's defection, but new blood enters the family by irregular courses through Bell and Judith, and it looks as if Michael and Ruth were to establish Krindlesyke

again in solid ways. Ralph will take after his steady father, but Nicholas has both Peter and Bell in him and promises fresh complications in his time.

A thick sprinkling of Northumbrian dialect, not all of it as clear to Southern minds as the poet expects from the emotional context, adds vigour to the blank verse, but Ezra and Bell, at least, are strong without such help. Bell particularly captures one's admiration, and there is both fine comparison of characters and skilful revelation of situations and personalities that carry each part to a crisis and natural solution.

'The work was not conceived with a view to stage-production,' and it is doubtful whether it would move on the boards, for reminiscence and description, not interaction, reveal the characters. The persons do not alter, save in the one case of Phoebe's revulsion of feeling which causes the one vigorous dramatic moment in the whole. Interest is concentrated on the persons for their own sake and in the history of the homestead. No generalisation is drawn from it, save that nature has her way with the sons and daughters of men. That nature is almost Krindlesyke itself.

'Kestrel Edge and other Plays' (1924) consists of two short tragedies—'Lover's Leap,' 'Kestrel Edge'—and a group of three still shorter comedies named 'Gangrels.'

'Lover's Leap' in five scenes develops the story of the last chase and death of a woman-harrier, Angus Earnshaw, master of the farm of Windwhistle on the border and husband of Lucy. Esther Burn mates him in resolution and to protect her younger sister Adah, who has fallen under Angus's fascination,

meets him on the crag of Lover's Leap, and when he attempts to seize her, strikes him so that he falls over the precipice, then hurls herself after, so that she may pay the penalty of murder and not be acquitted of manslaughter because of her sex. The other three women, Adah, Lucy and Angus's mother Rachel—all equally but differently bound to Angus—are left on the crag-top lamenting, but without the ultimate courage to take the plunge, just as Alec, Angus's brother, had not the masterfulness to capture Adah's love when it was plainly his for the taking. Here for the first time Mr. Gibson has developed action, powerfully and inevitably from the interplay of character. The dialogue does not merely reveal personality and earlier history, as in the former pieces, but propels each of the persons to the end marked out by inward necessity, the strong to a terrible heroic doom, the half-strong and weak to dissolution.

In 'Gangrels' the first two scenes are connected with each other. In the first—'Red Rowan'—interest centres on the succession, by force of will, of the young woman Blackadder to mastery over the three men and other two women in a horse-copers' camp near Yetholm. The deposed old queen, Red Rowan, must rule someone, and forces a passing tramp, Albert Edward Higgs, to take her with him.

In the second play, named after her, Blackadder's turn has come to have her sway disputed. Her will is still strong enough to quell the general revolt, but a wandering young soldier, one-legged from the Boer War and with ague upon him, becomes her master though he lacks spirit to rule the others, and one is

left doubting whether he can make the gipsy Blackadder into the settled wife he expects.

'Winter's Stob,' the third play, centres upon impulses to murder. Winter, executed in Newcastle, had been hanged in chains, for robbery and murder of an old woman, on a gibbet near which now a new drama plays itself out. The old driver, Nebby Peter, uses Winter's story effectively to control the healthy though excitable young Curly Dodd, deserted by a light o' love girl for Spanker Ord, but the dour Spanker, who has been deserted in turn, can be held by no words from following Winter's road to perdition.

Finally, 'Kestrel Edge,' in three scenes, presents the crisis and *dénouement* of a domestic tragedy. Naomi Angerton, freed from a hard cold life by the sudden death of the husband twenty-five years older than herself, has planned to leave for Canada next day with Robert Ellershaw, who she believes, from his words, killed her husband in fair fight. Her elder son Reuben, now twenty-five, knows that Robert shot his father from behind a hedge, but for his mother's sake has suppressed the only witness with money and threats. The younger son Gideon, a fanatical lay-preacher, has discovered the secret and feels called on to act as avenger of God's justice. Naomi learns the truth of the murder, and while, in agony, she reveals to Reuben the torture of her life, Gideon slips out and shoots Robert, who is on his way to claim Naomi. To save his brother, half-crazed now by fear of hanging, Reuben takes the crime upon himself.

The diction throughout the volume is markedly

superior in simplicity, smoothness and vigour to anything preceding. In the two tragedies, the persons not only reveal themselves by talk, but also bring about by action the solution which their characters necessitate. 'Gangrels' is significant for well-drawn humorous characters—the tramp, the soldier and Nebby Peter. 'Kestrel Edge' stands apart, because the breeding and natural rightness of the Angerton family call into play nobler human qualities of honour and self-sacrifice, separated in Gideon and Naomi, combined in Reuben. If there is one thread connecting the other plays, it is the poet's interest in the clash of wills, and mainly between men and women, treated as tragedy in 'Lover's Leap' and as comedy in 'Gangrels.'

'I Heard a Sailor' (1925), the latest volume of Mr. Gibson, collects, presumably, the moments of lyrical insight given by the seven years since the publication of 'Whin.' Of the 103 poems in it, fifty-two are assembled under the general title of 'Others,' signifying that their subjects lie outside the poet's own personality; the title 'Beauty for Ashes' for the remaining fifty-one suggests the conversion of painful experience into the pleasure of art, and covers, with four possible exceptions, pure lyrics, in the sense that the poet represents himself in them as the subject of experience.

The great majority—two-thirds—of the poems in 'Others' is occupied with the loves, hates and superstitions of the countryside, a quarter are poems relating to the sea, and there remain four or five that vitalise mining and forging. The presence of eleven poems

in dialogue among these reveal the potency of the dramatic instinct, which remains even in the latest lyric work of Mr. Gibson, and one particular type—a debate, either between youth and age or between the sexes—reminds the reader of the mediæval ‘*estrif*’ in reduced form and is responsible for the three ‘*fairing*’ poems that are the freshest in the volume. The twelve poems devoted to his children being set apart, the lyrics in ‘*Beauty for Ashes*’ show something of an inversion of the experience of ‘*Others*.’ Here, instead of projecting his imagination into the lives of sailors and peasants, the poet draws figures or incidents from country and sea-life into relationship with himself in order to illuminate and explain the obscure movements of the soul—its passions and conflicts. Thus, for example, while in ‘*Others*’ the forge creates an image of the forger’s death as a sacrifice to its flames, in ‘*Beauty for Ashes*’ the making of iron ‘*pigs*’ is felt as a symbol of life completed in death; or, again, the spirit abiding in Roman remains is, in the one, projected into reality as entering into a new-born child, in the other felt subjectively as a terrifying presence.

Prosodic technique in ‘*I Heard a Sailor*’ has advanced greatly upon ‘*Whin*,’ first in the appearance of trisyllabic rhythms with fair frequency, second in the free handling of a tremendous multiplicity of stanza-forms. All lengths of line are employed, from two feet to eight, and combined in stanzas of from two to eight lines. Twice, stanzas of ten lines appear, and there is one of thirteen. Sixty-three combinations, in all, of line-length, rhyme-arrangement and

stanza-form appear in the 103 poems—a sufficient indication perhaps of the poet's richness of lyrical conception, and also of his inward need that each kind of experience shall receive its appropriate, often unique, form.

Any judgments on contemporary life, and still more on its artistic productions, must be tentative and perilous, and are generally eschewed by the wise. One who has embarked, however, on the interpretation of one of our moderns must risk charges of short-sight and inadequacy, and attempt to fulfil his purpose by indicating what he sees to be the place of his poet among the seers and singers of the time.

Some analysis is first necessary of the England that is being born in these days, for it is at least generally agreed that the new century differs from the last even while it is its child.

For convenience and simplicity, the 20th century may be regarded as having broken three bonds which held together the 19th and, still more, the 18th, and to be developing and living on three promises in their place. The broken bonds are those of Monarchism, of Ecclesiasticism and of Competition, the promises those of Democracy, of Scientific Progress and of Co-operation. The 18th century saw the first intellectual developments of all three promises, the 19th saw their irruption into society, it is likely to be the history of the 20th to see their realisation and decay.

Ultimately, perhaps, the old bonds and the new promises are obverse and reverse of the same medal, the One and the Many, for the three bonds represent the One in control of state, church and people, which

forces have been tending to bring under the control of the Many. Victorianism has given way to Georgianism, the authority of the word is much shaken by the authority of experiment, and comfortably throned Competition is faced by the infant League of Nations.

The three conflicts are, relatively to each other, in very different stages of development, and also according as each country in which they are in progress is regarded by itself. In England the monarchy is as far democratic as its inherent character will allow, and that struggle is nearly over ; in theology, leading thought in the Protestant churches is deeply coloured with Evolutionism ; in economic affairs, the creation of the new system is only in birth. The English nation at the present day may be regarded, then, as engaged in three conflicts at once. The first is practically settled, because progressive democratic control of state has been the speciality of our race and history. The second and third are still creating wide and deep vortices.

When the poetry of the modern age is considered, a further step in thought has to be taken, for while here the universal movement, or currents of it, are felt in the individual soul, a poet's work is not the reflection of the general mind but his reaction to it, which may vary from enthusiastic acceptance to complete negation of the modern trend, so that, while Mr. Noyes glories in scientific progress in 'The Torch Bearers,' Mr. de la Mare retires completely from the whirl of modern life into the dream-world of childhood or the twilight of spirits.



Mr. Gibson has felt impulses from only one of the three stated conflicts, and from that one, Democracy, which in its political and social aspects if not in the economic, has achieved some measure of clarity. The way, also, in which he feels it is the farthest removed from class-warfare or any form of political or social disturbance. Rather, there is visible a combination of the lyrical poet's interest in his own soul with the dramatic poet's interest in human situations which may never be his own. It is the soul of the working folk on moors and in field and forge that is his province; external conditions of modern change play a relatively small rôle in his interpretations. And yet he is significant of this age just because it is only now that working folk of every type have come to be considered as worthy of study objectively and in their humanity—Crabbe regarded them from the cultured and middle-class level, Wordsworth used them either as masks for himself or as incentives to better Wordsworthian living. In the 'Northern Farmer' Tennyson experimented—in what did he not experiment?—in the new social material and its dialect, but it has been given to the last thirty years, to Mr. Hardy, Mr. Bennett and Mr. Wells in the novel, to Mr. Galsworthy and to Lancashire and Yorkshire dialect plays in drama, and to Mr. Masfield and Mr. Gibson in narrative and dramatic verse to work the newly opened lode.

This is not to say that Mr. Gibson follows a conscious tradition in the choice of his material. It has been shown, rather, that he came upon it almost

against his will, that obscure forces in him proposed it as his subject, and that his genius set itself the task by the light of self-knowledge, of exploiting the wonders and intricacies of the most primitive human beings in contemporary English civilisation.

Tradition there has been, for him, on the formal side of his work. Two traditions, indeed, can be traced here—the Shelley-Tennyson-Swinburne tradition in pure lyrical work and in the lyrical narrative, and another tradition in dramatic monologue and dramatic narrative that found its best Victorian expression in Browning, but which has consciously influenced Mr. Gibson through Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie.

How peculiar and individual, nevertheless,—whatever tradition has had to do with it—is Mr. Gibson's note! He lacks or has not yet demonstrated save isolatedly, the lyrical *élan* or the singing quality of the Shelley-Swinburne tradition, has found himself rather in the Browning-Abercrombie tradition of blank or rhymed verse of ten syllables, and has developed immensely the paragraph-stanza and even the sonnet. But the qualities for which he is valuable are his own—that fine and intense sensibility to human struggle, suffering and loss in primitive lives, that skill in introspective analysis which is only revealed by the equal skill with which he embodies his discoveries in living human characters, that severe independence of ready-made or traditional formulae in judging character or human attainment, that unwearied perfecting of a verse technique which is already surprising in its command and variety in

the earlier works and seems inexhaustibly productive of new forms in the latest.

There are limits also to Mr. Gibson's work as it stands, as there are to that of any other poet. One possible natural limit has been suggested already—his lines seldom possess the quality of memorability; even his lyrics, though rich and full of beauty, do not sing. That may be because great analytic and dramatic powers so seldom allow of abandoned self-expression. But there is a greater limit imposed by the quality of the subject-matter, namely, the comparatively small range of incident and consequent human experience possible to his working folk. Accident and sudden death; domestic incompatibility and jealousy; the monotonous strains and consequent fierce obsessions and dreams of industrial labour, the strange workings of memory, both in the individual, the sex, and even the place; finally, half-liberated spirit forces, generally malignant, or at least ominous, in places long inhabited by the same families; these—and they seem many, but their dramatic effects are often similar—cover all the possibilities of his material.

The power of his work hitherto lies in its fresh vision, in its entire rejection of all sentimental and false appeals and in its fine workmanship; its limitation is that the only philosophy of life possible to his creations is in common phrase to 'Grin and bear it,' in poetic speech—

'Men must endure  
Their going hence even as their coming hither:  
Ripeness is all.'

This can be only an interim opinion, however. Mr. Gibson is still in early maturity, and from his art—always perfecting itself and entering further into human fortunes and destiny—the greatest expectations can be cherished.

EDWARD PARKER.



## FROM 'AKRA THE SLAVE'

Thus have the mortal years  
Flowed onward to the perfect end—  
This day of days  
That never night shall quench  
Nor darkness vanquish :  
And at dawn  
I die.

And yet this morning as I slowly climbed  
The steep ascending stages  
That lead up to the hanging-gardens—  
Where, tier on tier,  
The great brick arches bore  
Their April wealth of blossoms,  
Plumed with palm and dusky cypress—  
I little knew that I  
Who came to carve a garland  
Round a fountain's porphyry basin,  
Should scale so soon the utmost peak of life.  
Throughout the morn I toiled,  
Until an hour ere noon—  
For no one, save the King and Queen,  
May walk in those high gardens, after midday  
When underneath a cypress shade  
I paused a moment, resting,

And looking down upon the basking city,  
Beneath me slumbering deeply—  
Garden on garden glowing, grove on grove,  
Like some green fabric shot with myriad hues,  
And chequered with white clusters of flat roofs  
Aquiver in clear heat :  
And then I gazed up through the aching azure  
At the restless kites that hover  
Ever over Babylon :  
And, as I watched one broad-winged bird that hung  
Above the seven-coloured pyramid  
Of Bel's great temple  
With wide pinions spread,  
As though it kept eternal vigil over  
The golden image in the golden shrine,  
I thought of eagles poised  
Above the peaks of glittering snows  
Beyond the Eastern plains.  
Half-dreaming, thus I lay,  
Lulled by the tinkling waters,  
Till, unawares, sleep slowly overcame me ;  
And noonday drifted by :  
And still, I slept, unheeding :  
And in my sleep  
I looked on Beauty in a quiet place  
Of forest gloom and immemorial dream :  
When, something rousing me from slumber,  
With waking eyes that yet seemed dream-enchanted,  
I looked upon the Queen,  
Where, in a secret close  
Set thickly round with screens of yew and ilex  
She stood upon the dark, broad brim

Of a wide granite basin, gazing down  
With dreaming eyes into the glooming cool,  
Unraimented, save of the flickering gleam  
Reflected from the lucent waters  
That flowed before her silently :  
And slowly from her feet  
The cold light rippled up her body, till,  
Entangled in the meshes of her hair,  
It flooded the calm rapture of her face :  
When, dreaming still, she lifted up her eyes,  
Unseeing ; and I looked upon her soul,  
Unveiled, in naked immortality  
Untrammelled by the trappings of brief time,  
And cloaks of circumstance.  
How long I looked upon the perfect beauty,  
I cannot tell—  
Each moment, flowing to eternity,  
Bearing me further from time's narrow shores ;  
Though, yet a little while  
From those unshadowed deeps time sought to hold me.

Suddenly I felt  
A ghostly arrow pierce my life ;  
And I leapt up, and turning,  
I saw the King beside me  
With steely, glittering eyes  
Shooting barbèd anger,  
Though he coldly spake,  
With evil, curling lips :  
“ Slave, thou art dead ! ”  
And yet I did not quail :  
But, looking 'twixt his brows,



I answered : and he blenched before my words :

“ Nay ! I have seen :

“ And am newborn, a King ! ”

And then his craven fingers

Went quaking to his wagging beard,

As if he felt my clutch upon his throat :

Yet, though, with one quick blow,

I might have hurled him down to death,

I never stirred :

And, eyeing me, he summoned

The negro-eunuchs, who kept watch below :

But I, ere they could spring up the first stage,

Went forth to meet them ;

And they bound my wrists.

And so down from the hills my life has flowed  
Until at fullest flood it meets the sea.

With calm and unregretful heart I wait

Till dawn shall loose the arrow from the bow.

I, who, with eager, faltering hand have sought

To fashion a little beauty, in the end,

Have looked on the perfect beauty, and I die—

Even as the priest, who, in the heart of night,

Trembling before the thunder-riven shrine,

Looks on the face of God, and perishes.

I die . . .

And yet, maybe, when earth lies heavily

Upon the time-o'ertoppled towers,

And tumbled walls, and broken gates of brass ;

And the winds whisper one another :

“ Where, Oh where is Babylon ? ”

In the dim underworld of dreaming shades,

My soul shall seek out beauty  
And look once more  
Upon the unveiled vision . . .  
And not die.

Night passes : and already in the court,  
Amid the splash of fountains,  
There sounds the pad of naked feet approaching.  
With slow, deliberate pace,  
As though they trod out all my perished years,  
The Nubians come, to lead me out to death.  
Slowly the great door opens ;  
And clearer comes the call of waters ;  
Cool airs are on my brow . . .  
Lo ! . . . in the East, the dawn.

## SELECTIONS FROM 'FIRES'

### PRELUDE

*Snug in my easy chair,  
I stirred the fire to flame.  
Fantastically fair  
The flickering fancies came,  
Born of heart's desire :  
Amber woodland streaming ;  
Topaz islands dreaming ;  
Sunset-cities gleaming,  
Spire on burning spire ;  
Ruddy-windowed taverns ;  
Sunshine-spilling wines ;  
Crystal-lighted caverns  
Of Golconda's mines ;  
Summers, unreturning ;  
Passion's crater yearning ;  
Troy, the ever-burning ;  
Shelley's lustral pyre ;  
Dragon-eyes, unsleeping ;  
Witches' cauldrons leaping ;  
Golden galleys sweeping  
Out from sea-walled Tyre :  
Fancies, fugitive and fair,  
Flashed with singing through the air ;*

*Till, dazzled by the drowsy glare,  
I shut my eyes to heat and light ;  
And saw, in sudden night,  
Crouched in the dripping dark  
With steaming shoulders stark,  
The man who hews the coal to feed my fire.*

## THE SHOP

TIN-tinkle-tinkle-tinkle went the bell,  
As I pushed in ; and once again the smell  
Of groceries, and news-sheets freshly-printed  
That always greeted me when I looked in  
To buy my evening-paper : but to-night  
I wondered not to see the well-known face,  
With kind, brown eyes, and ever-friendly smile,  
Behind the counter ; and to find the place  
Deserted at this hour, and not a light  
In either window. Waiting there a while,  
Though wondering at what change these changes  
hinted,  
I yet was grateful for the quiet gloom—  
Lit only by a gleam from the back-room,  
And, here and there, a glint of glass and tin—  
So pleasant, after all the flare and din  
And hubbub of the foundry : and my eyes,  
Still tingling from the smoke, were glad to rest  
Upon the ordered shelves, so neatly dressed  
That, even in the dusk, they seemed to tell  
No little of the hand that kept them clean,  
And of the head that sorted things so well  
That naught of waste or worry could be seen,

And kept all sweet with ever-fresh supplies.  
And as I thought upon her quiet way,  
Wondering what could have got her, that she'd left  
The shop, unlit, untended, and bereft  
Of her kind presence, overhead I heard  
A tiptoe creak, as though somebody stirred,  
With careful step, across the upper floor :  
Then all was silent, till the back-room door  
Swung open ; and her husband hurried in.  
He feared he'd kept me, waiting in the dark ;  
And he was sorry : but his wife who served  
The customers at night-time usually—  
While he made up the ledger after tea,  
Was busy, when I . . . Well, to tell the truth,  
They were in trouble, for their little son  
Had come in ill from school . . . the doctor said  
Pneumonia . . . they'd been putting him to bed :  
Perhaps I'd heard them, moving overhead,  
For boards would creak, and creak, for all your care.  
They hoped the best ; for he was young ; and youth  
Could come through much ; and all that could be  
done  
Would be . . . then he stood, listening, quite unnerved,  
As though he heard a footstep on the stair,  
Though I heard nothing : but at my remark  
About the fog and sleet, he turned,  
And answered quickly, as there burned  
In his brown eyes an eager flame :  
The raw and damp were much to blame :  
If but his son might breathe West-country air !  
A certain Cornish village he could name  
Was just the place ; if they could send him there,

## THE SHOP

And only for a week, he'd come back stronger . . .  
And then, again, he listened : and I took  
My paper, and went, afraid to keep him longer ;  
And left him standing with that haggard look.

Next night, as I pushed in, there was no tinkle :  
And, glancing up, I saw the bell was gone ;  
Although, in either window, the gas shone ;  
And I was greeted by a cheery twinkle  
Of burnished tins and bottles from the shelves :  
And now, I saw the father busy there  
Behind the counter, cutting with a string  
A bar of soap up for a customer,  
With weary eyes, and jerky, harassed air,  
As if his mind were hardly on the task :  
And when 'twas done, and parcelled up for her,  
And she had gone, he turned to me, and said :  
He thought that folks might cut their soap them-  
selves . . .

'Twas nothing much . . . but any little thing,  
At such a time . . . And, having little doubt  
The boy was worse, I did not like to ask ;  
So picked my paper up, and hurried out.

And, all next day, amid the glare and clang  
And clatter of the workshop, his words rang ;  
And kept on ringing, in my head a-ring ;  
But any little thing . . . at such a time . . .  
And kept on chiming to the anvil's chime :  
But any little thing . . . at such a time . . .  
And they were hissed and sputtered in the sizzle  
Of water on hot iron : little thing . . .  
At such a time : and, when I left, at last,

The smoke and steam ; and walked through the cold  
drizzle,  
The lumbering of the 'buses as they passed  
Seemed full of it ; and to the passing feet,  
The words kept patter, patter, with dull beat.

I almost feared to turn into their street,  
Lest I should find the blinds down in the shop :  
And, more than once, I'd half-a-mind to stop  
And buy my paper from the yelling boys,  
Who darted all about with such a noise  
That I half-wondered, in a foolish way,  
How they could shriek so, knowing that the sound  
Must worry children, lying ill in bed . . .  
Then, thinking even they must earn their bread,  
As I earned mine, and scarce as noisily !  
I wandered on ; and very soon I found  
I'd followed where my thoughts had been all day.  
And stood before the shop, relieved so see  
The gases burning, and no window-blind  
Of blank foreboding. With an easier mind,  
I entered slowly ; and was glad to find  
The father by the counter, 'waiting me,  
With paper ready and a cheery face.  
Yes ! yes ! the boy was better . . . took the turn,  
Last night, just after I had left the place.  
He feared that he'd been short and cross last night . . .  
But, when a little child was suffering,  
It worried you . . . and any little thing,  
At such a moment, made you cut up rough :  
Though, now that he was going on all right . . .  
Well, he'd have patience, now, to be polite !

And, soon as ever he was well enough,  
The boy should go to Cornwall for a change—  
Should go to his own home ; for he, himself,  
Was Cornish, born and bred, his wife as well :  
And still his parents lived in the old place—  
A little place, as snug as snug could be . . .  
Where apple-blossom dipped into the sea . . .  
Perhaps, to strangers' ears, that sounded strange—  
But not to any Cornishman who knew  
How sea and land ran up into each other ;  
And how, all round each wide, blue estuary,  
The flowers were blooming to the waters' edge :  
You'd come on blue-bells like a sea of blue . . .  
But they would not be out for some while yet . . .  
'Twould be primroses, blowing everywhere,  
Primroses, and primroses, and primroses . . .  
You'd never half-know what primroses were,  
Unless you'd seen them growing in the West ;  
But, having seen, would never more forget.  
Why, every bank and every lane and hedge  
Was just one blaze of yellow ; and the smell,  
When the sun shone upon them, after wet . . .  
And his eyes sparkled, as he turned to sell  
A penny loaf and half-an-ounce of tea  
To a poor child, who waited patiently,  
With hacking cough that tore her hollow chest :  
And, as she went out, clutching tight the change,  
He muttered to himself : It's strange, it's strange  
That little ones should suffer so . . . The light  
Had left his eyes : but when he turned to me,  
I saw a flame leap in them, hot and bright.  
I'd like to take them all, he said, to-night !



And, in the workshop, all through the next day,  
The anvils had another tune to play . . .  
Primroses, and primroses, and primroses :  
The bellows puffing out : It's strange, it's strange  
That little ones should suffer so . . .  
And now, my hammer, at a blow :  
I'd like to take them all, to-night !  
And in the clouds of steam and white-hot glow  
I seemed to see primroses everywhere,  
Primroses, and primroses, and primroses.

And each night after that I heard the boy  
Was mending quickly ; and would soon be well :  
Till one night I was startled by the bell—  
Tin-tinkle-tinkle-tinkle, loud and clear ;  
And tried to hush it, lest the lad should hear.  
But, when the father saw me clutch the thing,  
He said the boy had missed it yesterday ;  
And wondered why he could not hear it ring ;  
And wanted it ; and had to have his way.  
And then, with brown eyes burning with deep joy,  
Told me his son was going to the West—  
Was going home . . . the doctor thought, next week,  
He'd be quite well enough : the way was long ;  
But trains were quick ; and he would soon be there :  
And on the journey he'd have every care,  
His mother being with him . . . it was best,  
That she should go : for he would find it strange,  
The little chap, at first . . . she needed change . . .  
And, when they'd had a whiff of Western air !  
'Twould cost a deal ; and there was naught to spare :  
But, what was money, if you hadn't health :

And, what more could you buy, if you'd the wealth . . .  
Yes ! 'twould be lonely for himself, and rough ;  
Though, on the whole, he'd manage well enough :  
He'd have a lot to do : and there was naught  
Like work to keep folk cheerful : when the hand  
Was busy, you had little time for thought ;  
And thinking was the mischief . . . and 'twas grand  
To know that they'd be happy. Then the bell  
Went tinkle-tinkle ; and he turned to sell.

One night he greeted me with face that shone,  
Although the eyes were wistful ; they were gone—  
Had gone this morning, he was glad to say :  
And, though 'twas sore work, setting them away,  
Still, 'twas the best for them . . . and they would be  
Already in the cottage by the sea . . .  
He spoke no more of them ; but turned his head ;  
And said he wondered if the price of bread . . .  
And, as I went again into the night,  
I saw his eyes were glistening in the light.

And, two nights after that, he'd got a letter :  
And all was well : the boy was keeping better ;  
And was as happy as a child could be,  
All day with the primroses and the sea,  
And pigs ! Of all the wonders of the West,  
His mother wrote, he liked the pigs the best.  
And now the father laughed until the tears  
Were in his eyes, and chuckled : Ay ! he knew !  
Had he not been a boy there once, himself ?  
He'd liked pigs, too, when he was his son's years.  
And then, he reached a half-loaf from the shelf  
And twisted up a farthing's worth of tea,

And farthing's worth of sugar, for the child,  
The same poor child who waited patiently,  
Still shaken by a hacking, racking cough.

And all next day the anvils rang with jigs :  
The bellows roared and rumbled with loud laughter,  
Until it seemed the workshop had gone wild,  
And it would echo, echo, ever after  
The tune the hammers tinkled on and off,  
A silly tune of primroses and pigs . . .  
Of all the wonders of the West  
He liked the pigs, he liked the pigs the best !

Next night, as I went in, I caught  
A strange, fresh smell. The postman had just brought  
A precious box from Cornwall, and the shop  
Was lit with primroses, that lay atop  
A Cornish pasty, and a pot of cream :  
And as, with gentle hands, the father lifted  
The flowers his little son had plucked for him,  
He stood a moment in a far-off dream,  
As though in glad remembrances he drifted  
On Western seas : and, as his eyes grew dim,  
He stooped, and buried them in deep, sweet bloom :  
Till, hearing once again the poor child's cough,  
He served her hurriedly, and sent her off,  
Quite happily, with thin hands filled with flowers.  
And as I followed to the street, the gloom  
Was starred with primroses ; and many hours  
The strange, shy flickering surprise  
Of that child's keen, enchanted eyes  
Lit up my heart, and brightened my dull room.

Then, many nights the foundry kept me late  
With overtime ; and I was much too tired  
To go round by the shop ; but made for bed  
As straight as I could go : until one night  
We'd left off earlier, though 'twas after eight,  
I thought I'd like some news about the boy ;  
I found the shop untended ; and the bell  
Tin-tinkle-tinkle-tinkled all in vain.  
And then I saw, through the half-curtained pane,  
The back-room was a very blaze of joy :  
And knew the mother and son had come safe back.  
And as I slipped away, now all was well,  
I heard the boy shriek out, in shrill delight :  
' And, father, all the little pigs were black ! '

## FLANNAN ISLE

"THOUGH three men dwell on Flannan Isle  
To keep the lamp alight,  
As we steered under the lee, we caught  
No glimmer through the night."

A passing ship at dawn had brought  
The news ; and quickly we set sail,  
To find out what strange thing might ail  
The keepers of the deep-sea light.

The Winter day broke blue and bright,  
With glancing sun and glancing spray,  
While o'er the swell our boat made way,  
As gallant as a gull in flight.

But as we neared the lonely Isle,  
And looked up at the naked height,  
And saw the lighthouse towering white,  
With blinded lantern, that all night  
Had never shot a spark  
Of comfort through the dark,  
So ghostly in the cold sunlight  
It seemed, that we were struck the while  
With wonder all too dread for words.  
And as into the tiny creek  
We stole beneath the hanging crag,  
We saw three queer, black, ugly birds—  
Too big, by far, in my belief,  
For cormorant or shag—  
Like seamen sitting bolt-upright  
Upon a half-tide reef :  
But, as we neared, they plunged from sight,  
Without a sound or spurt of white.

And still too mazed to speak,  
We landed ; and made fast the boat ;  
And climbed the track in single file,  
Each wishing he were safe afloat,  
On any sea, however far,  
So it be far from Flannan Isle :  
And still we seemed to climb, and climb,  
As though we'd lost all count of time,  
And so must climb for evermore.  
Yet, all too soon, we reached the door—  
The black, sun-blistered lighthouse-door,  
That gaped for us ajar.

As, on the threshold, for a spell,  
We paused, we seemed to breathe the smell

Of limewash and of tar,  
Familiar as our daily breath,  
As though 'twere some strange scent of death :  
And so, yet wondering, side by side,  
We stood a moment, still tongue-tied :  
And each with black foreboding eyed  
The door, ere we should fling it wide,  
To leave the sunlight for the gloom :  
Till, plucking courage up, at last,  
Hard on each other's heels we passed,  
Into the living-room.

Yet, as we crowded through the door,  
We only saw a table, spread  
For dinner, meat and cheese and bread ;  
But all untouched ; and no one there :  
As though, when they sat down to eat,  
Ere they could even taste,  
Alarm had come ; and they in haste  
Had risen and left the bread and meat :  
For at the table-head a chair  
Lay tumbled on the floor.

We listened ; but we only heard  
The feeble cheeping of a bird  
That starved upon its perch :  
And, listening still, without a word,  
We set about our hopeless search.

We hunted high, we hunted low ;  
And soon ransacked the empty house ;  
Then o'er the Island, to and fro,  
We ranged, to listen and to look  
In every cranny, cleft or nook

That might have hid a bird or mouse :  
But, though we searched from shore to shore,  
We found no sign in any place :  
And soon again stood face to face  
Before the gaping door :  
And stole into the room once more  
As frightened children steal.  
Ay : though we hunted high and low,  
And hunted everywhere,  
Of the three men's fate we found no trace  
Of any kind in any place,  
But a door ajar, and an untouched meal,  
And an overtoppled chair.

And as we listened in the gloom  
Of that forsaken living-room—  
A chill clutch on our breath—  
We thought how ill-chance came to all  
Who kept the Flannan Light :  
And how the rock had been the death  
Of many a likely lad :  
How six had come to a sudden end,  
And three had gone stark mad :  
And one whom we'd all known as friend  
Had leapt from the lantern one still night,  
And fallen dead by the lighthouse wall :  
And long we thought  
On the three we sought,  
And of what might yet befall.

Like curs a glance has brought to heel,  
We listened, flinching there :  
And looked, and looked, on the untouched meal,  
And the overtoppled chair.

We seemed to stand for an endless while,  
Though still no word was said,  
Three men, alive on Flannan Isle,  
Who thought on three men dead.

## THE BROTHERS

ALL morning they had quarrelled, as they worked,  
A little off their fellows, in the pit :  
Dick growled at Robert ; Robert said Dick shirked :  
And when the roof, dropt more than they had reckoned,  
Began to crack and split,  
Though both rushed like a shot to set  
The pit-props in their places,  
Each said the other was to blame,  
When, all secure, with flushed and grimy faces,  
They faced each other for a second.  
All morning they had quarrelled : yet,  
Neither had breathed her name.

Again they turned to work :  
And in the dusty murk  
Of that black gallery,  
Which ran out three miles underneath the sea,  
There was no sound at all,  
Save whispering creak of roof and wall,  
And crack of coal, and tap of pick,  
And now and then a rattling fall :  
While Robert worked on steadily, but Dick,  
In fits and starts, with teeth clenched tight,  
And dark eyes flashing in his lamp's dull light.



And when he paused, nigh spent, to wipe the sweat  
From off his dripping brow : and Robert turned  
To fling some idle jibe at him, the spark  
Of anger, smouldering in him, flared and burned—  
Though all his body quivered, wringing-wet—  
Till that black hole  
To him blazed red,  
As if the very coal  
Had kindled underfoot and overhead :  
Then, gripping tight his pick,  
He rushed upon his brother :  
But Robert, turning quick,  
Leapt up, and now they faced each other.

They faced each other : Dick with arm upraised,  
In act to strike, and murder in his eyes. . . .  
When, suddenly, with noise of thunder,  
The earth shook round them, rumbling over and under ;  
And Dick saw Robert, lying at his feet :  
As, close behind, the gallery crashed in :  
And almost at his heel, earth gaped asunder.  
By black disaster dazed,  
His wrath died ; and he dropped the pick ;  
And staggered, dizzily and terror-sick.  
But when the dust and din  
Had settled to a stillness, dread as death,  
And he once more could draw his breath,  
He gave a little joyful shout  
To find the lamps had not gone out.

And on his knees he fell  
Beside his brother, buried in black dust ;

And, full of tense misgiving,  
He lifted him, and thrust  
A knee beneath his head ; and cleared  
The dust from mouth and nose : but could not tell  
Awhile if he were dead or living.  
Too fearful to know what he feared,  
He fumbled at the open shirt,  
And felt till he could feel the heart,  
Still beating with a feeble beat :  
And then he saw the closed lids part,  
And saw the nostrils quiver ;  
And knew his brother lived, though sorely hurt.

Again he staggered to his feet,  
And fetched his water-can, and wet  
The ashy lips, and bathed the brow,  
Until his brother sat up with a shiver,  
And gazed before him with a senseless stare  
And dull eyes strangely set.  
Too well Dick knew that now  
They must not linger there,  
Cut off from all their mates, to be o'ertaken  
In less than no time by the deadly damp :  
So, picking up his lamp,  
He made his brother rise ;  
Then took him by the arm,  
And shook him, till he'd shaken  
An inkling of the danger and alarm  
Into those dull, still eyes :  
Then dragged him, and half-carried him, in haste,  
To reach the airway, where 'twould still be sweet  
When all the gallery was foul with gas :

But soon as they had reached it they were faced  
By a big fall of roof they could not pass ;  
And found themselves cut off from all retreat,  
On every hand, by that black shining wall ;  
With naught to do but sit and wait  
Till rescue came, if rescue came at all,  
And did not come too late.

And, in the fresher airway, light came back  
To Robert's eyes, although he never spoke :  
And not a sound the deathly quiet broke,  
As they sat staring at that wall of black—  
As, in the glimmer of the dusky lamp,  
They sat and wondered, wondered if the damp—  
The stealthy after-damp that creeping, creeping,  
Takes strong lads by the throat, and drops them  
    sleeping,  
To wake no more for any woman's weeping—  
Would steal upon them, ere the rescue came. . . .  
And if the rescuers would find them sitting,  
Would find them sitting cold. . . .  
Then, as they sat and wondered, like a flame  
One thought burned up both hearts :  
Still, neither breathed her name.

And now their thoughts dropped back into the pit,  
And through the league-long gallery went flitting  
With speed no fall could hold :  
They wondered how their mates had fared :  
If they'd been struck stone-dead,  
Or if they shared  
Like fate with them, or reached the shaft,  
Unhurt, and only scared,

Before disaster overtook them :  
And then, although their courage ne'er forsook them,  
They wondered once again if they must sit  
Awaiting death . . . but knowing well  
That even for a while to dwell  
On such like thoughts will drive a strong man daft :  
They shook themselves until their thoughts ran free  
Along the drift, and clambered in the cage ;  
And in a trice were shooting up the shaft :  
But when their thoughts had come to the pithead,  
And found the fearful people gathered there,  
Beneath the noonday sun,  
Bright-eyed with terror, blinded by despair,  
Dick rose, and with his chalk wrote on the wall,  
This message for their folk :  
" We can't get any further, 12, noonday "—  
And signed both names ; and, when he'd done,  
Though neither of them spoke,  
They both seemed easier in a way,  
Now that they'd left a word,  
Though nothing but a scrawl.

And silent still they sat,  
And never stirred :  
And Dick's thoughts dwelt on this and that :  
How, far above their heads, upon the sea  
The sun was shining merrily,  
And in its golden glancing  
The windy waves were dancing :  
And how he'd slept that morning on his way :  
And how on Friday, when he drew his pay,  
He'd buy a blanket for his whippet, Nell ;

He felt dead certain she would win the race,  
On Saturday . . . though you never could tell,  
There were such odds against her . . . but his face  
Lit up as though, even now, he saw her run,  
A little slip of lightning in the sun :  
While Robert's thoughts were ever on the match  
His team was booked to play on Saturday ;  
He placed the field, and settled who should play  
In Will Burn's stead ; for Will he had a doubt  
Was scarcely up to form, although . . .

Just then, the lamp went slowly out.

Still, neither stirred,  
Nor spoke a word ;  
Though either's breath came quickly, with a catch.

And now again one thought  
Set both their hearts afire  
In one fierce flame  
Of quick desire :  
Though neither breathed her name.

Then Dick stretched out his hand ; and caught  
His brother's arm ; and whispered in his ear :  
" Bob, lad, there's naught to fear . . .  
And, when we're out, lad, you and she shall wed."

Bob gripped Dick's hand ; and then no more was said,  
As, slowly, all about them rose  
The deadly after-damp ; but close  
They sat together, hand in hand.  
Then their minds wandered ; and Dick seemed to stand  
And shout till he was hoarse

To speed his winning whippet down the course . . .  
And Robert, with the ball  
Secure within his oxters charged ahead  
Straight for the goal, and none could hold,  
Though many tried a fall.

Then dreaming they were lucky boys in bed  
Once more, and lying snugly by each other :  
Dick, with his arms clasped tight about his brother,  
Whispered with failing breath  
Into the ear of death :  
' Come, Robert, cuddle closer, lad, it's cold.'

## THE MONEY

THEY found her cold upon the bed.  
The cause of death, the doctor said,  
Was nothing save the lack of bread.

Her clothes were but a sorry rag  
That barely hid the nakedness  
Of her poor body's piteous wreck :  
Yet, when they stripped her of her dress,  
They found she was not penniless ;  
For, in a little silken bag,  
Tied with red ribbon round her neck,  
Was four-pound-seventeen-and-five.

" It seems a strange and shameful thing  
That she should starve herself to death,  
While she'd the means to keep alive.  
Why, such a sum would keep the breath  
Within her body till she'd found

A livelihood ; and it would bring . . .  
But there is very little doubt  
She'd set her heart upon a grand  
And foolish funeral—for the pride  
Of poor folk, who can understand !—  
And so, because she was too proud  
To meet death penniless, she died.”  
And talking, talking, they trooped out :  
And, as they went, I turned about  
To look upon her in her shroud ;  
And saw again the quiet face  
That filled with light that shameful place,  
Touched with the tender, youthful grace  
Death brings the broken and outworn  
To comfort kind hearts left to mourn.

And as I stood, the sum they'd found  
Rang with a queer, familiar ring  
Of some uncouth, uncanny sound  
Heard in dark ages underground ;  
And “ four-pound-seventeen-and-five ”  
Through all my body seemed to sing,  
Without recalling anything  
To help me, strive as I might strive.

But, as I stumbled down the stairs  
Into the alley's gloom and stench—  
A whiff of burning oil  
That took me unawares—  
And I knew all there was to tell.  
And though the rain in torrents fell,  
I walked on, heedless, through the drench  
And all the while, I seemed to sit

Upon a tub in Lansel pit ;  
And in the candle-light to see  
John Askerton, a ' deputy,'  
Who paused awhile to talk with me,  
His kind face glistening black with toil.

" 'Twas here I found him dead, beside  
His engine. All the other men  
Were up—for things were slack just then—  
And I'd one foot upon the cage ;  
When, all at once, I caught the smell  
Of burning. Even as I turned  
To see what it could be that burned,  
The seam behind was choked with stife.  
And so I dropped on hands and knees,  
And crawled along the gallery,  
Beneath the smoke, that I might see  
What ailed : and as I crept, half-blind,  
With smarting eyes, and breath awheeze,  
I scarcely knew what I should find.  
At times, I thought I'd never know . . .  
And 'twas already quite an age  
Since I set out . . . I felt as though  
I had been crawling all my life  
Beneath the stifling cloud of smoke  
That clung about me fit to choke :  
And when, at last, I'd struggled here  
'Twas long ere I could see things clear . . .  
That he was lying here . . . and he  
Was dead . . . and burning like a tree . . .  
A tree-trunk soaked in oil . . . No doubt,  
The engine had caught fire, somehow ;  
And when he tried to put it out,



His greasy clothes had caught . . . and now !  
As fine a lad as you could see . . .  
And such a lad for singing . . . I  
Had heard him when I worked hard by ;  
And often quiet I would sit  
To hear him, singing in the pit,  
As though his heart knew naught of it  
And life was nothing but a song.

“ He'd not been working with us long :  
And little of his ways I knew :  
But when I'd got him up, at last,  
And he was lying in the shed,  
The sweet song silent in his breast,  
And there was nothing more to do ;  
The notion came into my head  
That he had always been well-dressed ;  
And seemed a neat and thrifty lad . . .  
And lived in lodgings . . . so, maybe,  
Would carry on him all he had.  
So, back into the cage I stepped :  
And when it reached the bottom, crept  
Along the gallery again ;  
And in the dust where he had lain,  
I rummaged, until I found all  
That from his burning pockets fell.  
And when it seemed there was no more,  
I thought how, happy and alive,  
And recking naught what might befall,  
He, too, for all that I could tell,  
Just where I stood, had reckoned o'er  
That four-pound-seventeen-and-five.

“ Ay, like enough . . . for soon we heard  
That in a week he'd looked to wed.  
He'd meant to give the girl that night  
The money to buy furniture.  
She came, and watched till morning-light  
Beside the body in the shed :  
Then rose : and took, without a word,  
The money he had left for her.”

. . . . .

Then, as I wandered through the rain,  
I seemed to stand in awe again  
Beside that lonely garret-bed.  
And it was good to think the dead  
Had known the wealth she would not spend  
To keep a little while alive—  
His four-pound-seventeen-and-five—  
Would buy her houseroom in the end.

## THE SLAG

AMONG bleak hills of mounded slag they walked,  
'Neath sullen evening skies that seemed to sag,  
O'er-burdened by the belching smoke, and lie  
Upon their aching foreheads, dense and dank,  
Till both felt youth within them fail and flag—  
Even as the flame which shot a fiery rag  
A fluttering moment through the murky sky  
Above the black blast-furnaces, then sank  
Again beneath the iron bell close-bound—  
And it was all that they could do to drag  
Themselves along, 'neath that dead-weight of smoke,

Over the cinder-blasted, barren ground.  
Though fitfully and fretfully she talked,  
He never turned his eyes to her, or spoke :  
And as he slouched with her along the track  
That skirted a stupendous, lowering mound,  
With listless eyes, and o'er-strained sinews slack,  
She bit a petted, puckered lip, and frowned  
To think she ever should be walking out  
With this tongue-tied, slow-witted, hulking lout,  
As cold and dull and lifeless as the slag.

On edge, and over-wrought by the cramp day  
Of crouched close stitching at her dull machine,  
It seemed to her a girl of seventeen  
Should have, at least, an hour of careless talking—  
Should have, at least, an hour of life, out walking  
Beside a lover, mettlesome and gay—  
Not through her too short freedom doomed to lag  
Beside a sparkless giant, glum and grim,  
Till all her eager youth should waste away.  
Yet, even as she looked askance at him—  
Well-knit, big-thewed, broad-chested, steady-eyed—  
She dimly knew of depths she could not sound  
In this strong lover, silent at her side :  
And, once again, her heart was touched with pride  
To think that he was hers, this strapping lad—  
Black-haired, close-cropt, clean-skinned, and neatly  
clad . . .  
His crimson neckerchief, so smartly tied—  
And hers alone, and more than all she had  
In all the world to her . . . and yet, so grave !  
If he would only show that he was glad  
To be with her—a gleam, a spark of fire,

A spurt of flame to shoot into the night,  
A moment through the murky heavens to wave  
An eager beacon of enkindling light  
In answer to her young heart's quick desire !

Yet, though he walked with dreaming eyes agaze,  
As, deep within a mound of slag, a core  
Of unseen fire may smoulder many days,  
Till suddenly the whole heap glow ablaze,  
That seemed, but now, dead cinder, grey and cold,  
Life smouldered in his heart. The fire he fed  
Day-long in the tall furnace just ahead  
From that frail gallery slung against the sky  
Had burned through all his being, till the ore  
Glowed in him. Though no surface-stream of gold,  
Quick-molten slag of speech was his to spill  
Unceasingly, the burning metal still  
Seethed in him, from the broken furnace-side  
To burst at any moment in a tide  
Of white-hot molten iron o'er the mould . . .

But still he spoke no word as they strolled on  
Into the early-gathering Winter night :  
And, as she watched the leaping furnace-light,  
She had no thought of smouldering fires unseen . .  
The daylong clattering whirr of her machine  
Hummed in her ears again—the straining thread  
And stabbing needle starting through her head—  
Until the last dull gleam of day was gone . . .

When, all at once, upon the right,  
A crackling crash, a blinding flare . . .  
A shower of cinders through the air . . .

A grind of blocks of slag aslide . . .  
And, far above them, in the night,  
The looming heap had opened wide  
About a fiery, gaping pit . . .  
And, startled and aghast at it,  
With clasping hands they stood astare,  
And gazed upon the awful glare :  
And, as she felt him clutch her hand,  
She seemed to know her heart's desire,  
For evermore with him to stand  
In that enkindling blaze of fire . . .  
When, suddenly, he left her side ;  
And started scrambling up the heap :  
And looking up, with stifled cry,  
She saw, against the glowing sky,  
Almost upon the pit's red brink,  
A little lad, stock-still with fright  
Before the blazing pit of dread  
Agape before him in the night,  
Where, playing castles on the height  
Since noon, he'd fallen, spent, asleep  
And dreaming he was home in bed . . .

With brain afire, too strained to think,  
She watched her lover climb and leap  
From jag to jag  
Of broken slag . . .  
And still he only seemed to creep . . .  
She felt that he would never reach  
That little lad, though he should climb  
Until the very end of time . . .  
And, as she looked, the burning breach

Gaped suddenly more wide . . .  
The slag again began to slide  
And crash into the pit,  
Until the dazed lad's feet  
Stood on the edge of it.  
She saw him reel and fall . . .  
And thought him done for . . . then  
Her lover, brave and tall,  
Against the glare and heat,  
A very fire-bright god of men !  
He stooped . . . and now she knew the lad  
Was safe with Robert, after all.  
And while she watched, a throng of folk  
Attracted by the crash and flare,  
Had gathered round, though no one spoke ;  
But all stood terror-stricken there,  
With lifted eyes and indrawn breath,  
Until the lad was snatched from death  
Upon the very pit's edge, when,  
As Robert picked him up, and turned,  
A sigh ran through the crowd ; and fear  
Gave place to joy, as cheer on cheer  
Sang through the kindled air . . .

But still she never uttered word,  
As though she neither saw nor heard ;  
Till as, at last, her lad drew near,  
She saw him bend with tender care  
Over the sobbing child who lay  
Safe in his arms, and hug him tight  
Against his breast—his brow alight  
With eager, loving eyes that burned

In his transfigured face aflame . . .  
And even when the parents came  
It almost seemed that he was loth  
To yield them up their little son ;  
As though the lad were his by right  
Of rescue, from the pit's edge won.

Then, as his eyes met hers, she felt  
An answering thrill of tenderness  
Run, quickening, through her breast ; and both  
Stood quivering there, with envious eyes,  
And stricken with a strange distress,  
As quickly homeward through the night  
The happy parents bore their boy . . .

And then, about her reeling bright,  
The whole night seemed to her to melt  
In one fierce, fiery flood of joy.

## *SELECTIONS FROM 'THOROUGHFARES'*

### SOLWAY FORD

HE greets you with a smile from friendly eyes  
But never speaks, nor rises from his bed :  
Beneath the green night of the sea he lies,  
The whole world's waters weighing on his head.

The empty wain made slowly over the sand ;  
And he, with hands in pockets, by the side  
Was trudging, deep in dream, the while he scanned  
With blue, unseeing eyes the far-off tide :  
When, stumbling in a hole, with startled neigh  
His young horse reared ; and, snatching at the rein,  
He slipped : the wheels crushed on him as he lay ;  
Then, tilting over him, the lumbering wain  
Turned turtle as the plunging beast broke free,  
And made for home : and pinioned and half-dead  
He lay, and listened to the far-off sea ;  
And seemed to hear it surging overhead  
Already : though 'twas full an hour or more  
Until high-tide, when Solway's shining flood  
Should sweep the shallow firth from shore to shore.  
He felt a salty tingle in his blood ;  
And seemed to stifle, drowning. Then again,  
He knew that he must lie a lingering while



## 78 SELECTIONS FROM 'THOROUGHFARES'

Before the sea might close above his pain,  
 Although the advancing waves had scarce a mile  
 To travel, creeping nearer, inch by inch,  
 With little runs and sallies over the sand.  
 Cooped in the dark, he felt his body flinch  
 From each chill wave as it drew nearer hand.  
 He saw the froth of each oncoming crest,  
 And felt the tugging of the ebb and flow,  
 And waves already breaking over his breast,  
 Though still far-off they murmured, faint and low,  
 Yet creeping nearer, inch by inch ; and now  
 He felt the cold drench of the drowning wave,  
 And the salt cold of death on lips and brow ;  
 And sank, and sank . . . while still, as in a grave,  
 In the close dark beneath the crushing cart,  
 He lay, and listened to the far-off sea.  
 Wave after wave was knocking at his heart,  
 And swishing, swishing, swishing ceaselessly  
 About the wain—cool waves that never reached  
 His cracking lips, to slake his hell-hot thirst . . .  
 Shrill in his ear a startled barn-owl screeched . . .  
 He smelt the smell of oil-cake . . . when there burst  
 Through the big barn's wide-open door, the sea—  
 The whole sea sweeping on him with a roar . . .  
 He clutched a falling rafter, dizzily . . .  
 Then sank through drowning deeps, to rise no more.  
 Down, ever down, a hundred years he sank  
 Through cold green death, ten thousand fathom deep.  
 His fiery lips deep draughts of cold sea drank  
 That filled his body with strange icy sleep,  
 Until he felt no longer that numb ache—  
 The dead-weight lifted from his legs at last :

And yet, he gazed with wondering eyes awake  
Up the green glassy gloom through which he passed :  
And saw, far overhead, the keels of ships  
Grow small and smaller, dwindling out of sight ;  
And watched the bubbles rising from his lips ;  
And silver salmon swimming in green night ;  
And queer big, yellow skate with scarlet fins  
And emerald eyes and fiery-flashing tails :  
Enormous eels with purple-spotted skins ;  
And mammoth unknown fish with sapphire scales  
That bore down on him with red jaws agape,  
Like yawning furnaces of blinding heat ;  
And when it seemed to him as though escape  
From those hell-mouths were hopeless, his bare feet  
Touched bottom : and he lay down in his place  
Among the dreamless legion of the drowned,  
The calm of deeps unsounded on his face,  
And calm within his heart ; while all around  
Upon the midmost ocean's crystal floor  
The naked bodies of dead seamen lay,  
Dropped, sheer and clean, from hubbub, brawl and  
    roar,  
To peace, too deep for any tide to sway.

. . . . .  
The little waves were lapping round the cart  
Already, when they rescued him from death.  
Life cannot touch the quiet of his heart  
To joy or sorrow, as, with easy breath,  
And smiling lips, upon his back he lies,  
And never speaks, nor rises from his bed ;  
Gazing through those green glooms with happy eyes,  
While gold and sapphire fish swim overhead.

## THE VIXEN

THE vixen made for Deadman's Flow,  
 Where not a mare but mine could go :  
 And three hounds only splashed across  
 The quaking hags of mile-wide moss ;  
 Only three of the deadbeat pack  
 Scrambled out by Lone Maid's Slack,  
 Bolter, Tough, and Ne'er-die-Nell :  
 But as they broke across the fell  
 The tongue they gave was good to hear,  
 Lively music clean and clear,  
 Such as only light-coats make,  
 Hot-trod through the girth-deep brake.

The vixen, draggled and nigh spent,  
 Twisted through the rimy bent  
 Towards the Christhope Crag. I thought  
 Every earth stopt . . . winded . . . caught . . .  
 She's a mask and brush ! When white  
 A squall of snow swept all from sight ;  
 And hoodman-blind, Lightfoot and I,  
 Battled with the roaring sky.

When southerly the snow had swept,  
 Light broke, as the vixen crept  
 Slinking up the stony brae.  
 On a jutting scar she lay,  
 Panting, lathered, while she eyed  
 The hounds that took the stiff brae-side  
 With yelping music, mad to kill.

Then vixen, hounds and craggy hill  
 Were smothered in a blinding swirl :

And when it passed, there stood a girl  
Where the vixen late had lain,  
Smiling down as I drew rein,  
Baffled ; and the hounds, deadbeat,  
Fawning at the young girl's feet,  
Whimpered, cowed, where her red hair,  
Streaming to her ankles bare,  
Turned as white among the heather  
As the vixen's brush's feather.

Flinching on my flinching mare,  
I watched her, gaping and astare,  
As she smiled with red lips wide,  
White fangs curving either side  
Of her lolling tongue . . . My thrapple  
Felt fear's fang : I strove, agrapple,  
Reeling . . . and again blind snow  
Closed like night.

No man may know  
How Lightfoot won through Deadman's Flow.  
And naught I knew till, in the glow  
Of home's wide door, my wife's kind face  
Smiled welcome. And for me the chase,  
The last chase, ended. Though the pack  
Through the blizzard struggled back,  
Gone were Bolter, Tough, and Nell,  
Where, the vixen's self can tell !  
Long we sought them, high and low,  
By Christhope Crag and Deadman's Flow,  
By slack and syke and hag : and found  
Never bone nor hair of hound.

### WOOLGATHERING

YOUTH that goes woolgathering,  
 Mooning and stargazing,  
 Always finding everything  
 Full of fresh amazing,  
 Best will meet the moment's need  
 When the dream brings forth the deed.

He who keeps through all his days  
 Open eyes of wonder  
 Is the lord of skiey ways,  
 And the earth thereunder :  
 For the heart to do and sing  
 Comes of youth's woolgathering.

### ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH

AGAINST the green flame of the hawthorn-tree  
 His scarlet tunic burns ;  
 And livelier than the green sap's mantling glee  
 The Spring fire tingles through him headily,  
 As quivering he turns

And stammers out the old amazing tale  
 Of youth and April weather :  
 While she, with half-breathed jests that, sobbing, fail,  
 Sits tight-lipped, quaking, eager-eyed and pale,  
 Beneath her purple feather.

## ON THE EMBANKMENT

Down on the sunlit ebb, with the wind in her sails, and  
free  
Of cable and anchor, she swept rejoicing to seek the  
sea.

And my eyes and my heart swept out with her,  
When at my elbow I felt a stir ;  
And, glancing down, I saw a lad—  
A shambling lad with shifty air,  
Weak-chested, stunted and ill-clad,  
Who watched her with unseeing stare.

Dull, watery grey eyes he had  
Blinking beneath the slouching cap  
That hid the low-browed close-cropped head :  
And as I turned to him, he said  
With hopeless hang-dog air :  
“ Just out of gaol three days ago,  
And I'll be back before I know ;  
For nothing else is left a chap  
When once he's been inside . . . and so . . . ”  
Then dumb he stood with sightless stare  
Set on the sunlit, windy sail of the far-off boat that free  
Of cable and anchor still swept on rejoicing to seek the  
sea.

My heart is a sunlit, windy sail :  
My heart is a hopeless lad in gaol.

## WHEELS

To safety of the kerb he thrust the crone,  
When a shaft took him in the back, and prone  
He tumbled heavily, but all unheard  
Amid the scurry of wheels that crashed and whirred  
About his senseless head—his helmet crushed  
Like crumpled paper by a car that rushed  
Upon him unaware. And as he lay  
He heard again the wheels he'd heard all day  
About him on point duty . . . only now  
Each red-hot wheel ran searing over his brow—  
A sizzling star with hub and spokes and tyre  
One monstrous Catherine-wheel of sparking fire  
Whirring down windy tunnels of the night. . . .  
That Catherine-wheel, somehow it will not light—  
Fixed to the broken paling ; and the pin  
Pricks the boy's finger as he jabs it in :  
He sucks the salty blood—the spiteful thing  
Fires, whizzing, sputtering sparks : he feels them sting  
His wincing cheek ; and, on the damp night-air,  
The stench of burnt saltpetre and singed hair. . . .  
While still he lies and listens without fear  
To the loud traffic rumbling in his ear—  
Wheels rumbling in his ear, and through his brain  
For evermore, a never-ending train  
Of scarlet postal-vans that whirl one red  
Perpetual hot procession through his head—  
His head that's just a clanking, clattering mill  
Of grinding wheels. . . . And down an endless hill  
After his hoop he runs, a little lad,  
Barefooted 'neath the stars, in nightshirt clad—

And stumbles into bed, the stars all gone,  
Though in his head the hoop keeps running on,  
And on and on : his head grown big and wide  
Holds all the windy night and stars inside. . . .  
And still within a hair's breadth of his ear  
The crunch and gride of wheels rings sharp and clear,  
Huge lumbering wagons, crusted axle deep  
With country marl, their drivers half-asleep  
Against green toppling mounds of cabbages  
Still crisp with dewy airs, or stacks of cheese  
Smelling of Arcady, till all the sky  
In clouds of cheese and cabbages rolls by—  
Great golden cheeses wheeling through the night,  
And giant cabbages of emerald light  
That tumble after, scattering crystal drops. . . .  
While in his ear the grinding never stops—  
Wheels grinding asphalt. . . . then a high-piled wain  
Of mignonette in boxes. . . . and again,  
A baby at his father's cottage-door,  
He toddles, treading on his pinafore,  
And tumbles headlong in a bed of bloom,  
Half-smothered in the deep, sweet honeyed gloom  
Of crushed, wet blossom, and the hum of bees—  
Big bumble-bees that buzz through flowery trees—  
Grows furious. . . . changing to a roar of wheels  
And honk of hooting horns : and now he feels  
That all the cars in London filled with light  
Are bearing down upon him through the night,  
As out of hall and theatre there pour  
White-shouldered women, ever more and more,  
Bright-eyed, with flashing teeth, borne in a throng  
Of purring, glittering cars, ten thousand strong ;



## 86 SELECTIONS FROM 'THOROUGHFARES'

Each drowsy dame, and eager chattering lass  
Laughing unheard within her box of glass. . . .  
And then great darkness, and a clanging bell—  
Clanging beneath the hollow dome of hell  
Aglow like burnished copper ; and a roar  
Of wheels and wheels and wheels for evermore,  
As engine after engine crashes by  
With clank and rattle under that red sky,  
Dropping a trail of burning coals behind,  
That scorch his eyeballs till he lies half-blind,  
Smouldering to cinder in a vasty night  
Of wheeling worlds and stars in whirring flight,  
And suns that blaze in thunderous fury on  
For ever and for ever, yet are gone  
Ere he can gasp to see them. . . . head to heels  
Slung round a monstrous red-hot hub, that wheels  
Across infinity, with spokes of fire  
That dwindle slowly till the shrinking tyre  
Is clamped like aching ice about his head. . . .

. . . . .  
He smells clean acid smells : and safe in bed  
He wakens in a lime-washed ward, to hear  
Somebody moaning almost in his ear,  
And knows that it's himself that moans : and then,  
Battling his way back to the world of men,  
He sees, with leaden eyelids opening wide,  
His young wife gravely knitting by his side.

### THE GORSE

In dream, again within the clean, cold hell  
Of glazed and aching silence he was trapped ;

And, closing in, the blank walls of his cell  
Crushed stifling on him . . . when the bracken snapped,  
Caught in his clutching fingers ; and he lay  
Awake upon his back among the fern,  
With free eyes travelling the wide blue day,  
Unhindered, unremembering ; while a burn  
Tinkled and gurgled somewhere out of sight  
Unheard of him ; till suddenly aware  
Of its cold music, shivering in the light,  
He raised himself, and with far-ranging stare  
Looked all about him : and, with dazed eyes wide  
Saw, still as in a numb, unreal dream,  
Black figures scouring a far hill-side,  
With now and then a sunlit rifle's gleam ;  
And knew the hunt was hot upon his track :  
Yet hardly seemed to mind, somehow, just then . . .  
But kept on wondering why they looked so black  
On that hot hillside, all those little men  
Who scurried round like beetles—twelve, all told . . .  
He counted them twice over ; and began  
A third time reckoning them, but could not hold  
His starved wits to the business, while they ran  
So brokenly, and always stuck at ' five ' . . .  
And ' One, two, three, four, five,' a dozen times  
He muttered . . . ' Can you catch a fish alive ? '  
Sang mocking echoes of old nursery rhymes  
Through the strained, tingling hollow of his head.  
And now, almost remembering, he was stirred  
To pity them ; and wondered if they'd fed  
Since he had, or if, ever since they'd heard  
Two nights ago the sudden signal-gun  
That raised alarm of his escape, they too,

## 88 SELECTIONS FROM 'THOROUGHFARES'

Had fasted in the wilderness, and run  
With nothing but the thirsty wind to chew,  
And nothing in their bellies but a fill  
Of cold peat-water, till their heads were light . . .

The crackling of a rifle on the hill  
Rang in his ears : and stung to headlong flight,  
He started to his feet ; and through the brake  
He plunged in panic, heedless of the sun  
That burned his cropped head to a red-hot ache  
Still racked with crackling echoes of the gun.

Then suddenly the sun-enkindled fire  
Of gorse upon the moor-top caught his eye :  
And that gold glow held all his heart's desire,  
As, like a witless, flame-bewildered fly,  
He blundered towards the league-wide yellow blaze,  
And tumbled headlong on the spikes of bloom ;  
And rising, bruised and bleeding and adaze,  
Struggled through clutching spines : the dense, sweet  
fume

Of nutty, acrid scent like poison stealing  
Through his hot blood : the bristling yellow glare  
Spiking his eyes with fire, till he went reeling,  
Stified and blinded, on—and did not care  
Though he were taken—wandering round and round,  
' Jerusalem the Golden ' quavering shrill,  
Changing his tune to ' Tommy Tiddler's Ground ' :  
Till, just a lost child on that dazzling hill,  
Bewildered in a glittering golden maze  
Of stinging scented fire, he dropped, quite done,  
A shrivelling wisp within a world ablaze  
Beneath a blinding sky, one blaze of sun.

## *SELECTIONS FROM 'BATTLE'*

### HILL-BORN

I SOMETIMES wonder if it's really true  
I ever knew  
Another life  
Than this unending strife  
With unseen enemies in lowland mud,  
And wonder if my blood  
Thrilled ever to the tune  
Of clean winds blowing through an April noon  
Mile after sunny mile  
On the green ridges of the Windy Gile.

### COMRADES

As I was marching in Flanders  
A ghost kept step with me—  
Kept step with me and chuckled  
And muttered ceaselessly :  
  
“ Once I too marched in Flanders,  
The very spit of you,  
And just a hundred years since,  
To fall at Waterloo.

## SELECTIONS FROM ' BATTLE '

" They buried me in Flanders  
Upon the field of blood,  
And long I've lain forgotten  
Deep in the Flemish mud.

" But now you march in Flanders,  
The very spit of me :  
To the ending of the day's march  
I'll bear you company."

## HIS FATHER

I QUITE forgot to put the spigot in.  
It's just come over me. . . . And it is queer  
To think he'll not care if we lose or win,  
And yet be jumping mad about that beer.

I left it running full. He must have said  
A thing or two. I'd give my stripes to hear  
What he will say if I'm reported dead  
Before he gets me told about that beer !

## THE DANCERS

ALL day beneath the hurtling shells  
Before my burning eyes  
Hover the dainty demoiselles—  
The peacock dragon-flies.

Unceasingly they dart and glance  
Above the stagnant stream—  
And I am fighting here in France  
As in a senseless dream.

A dream of shattering black shells  
That hurtle overhead,  
And dainty dancing demoiselles  
Above the dreamless dead.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

WHEN consciousness came back, he found he lay  
Between the opposing fires, but could not tell  
On which hand were his friends ; and either way  
For him to turn was chancy—bullet and shell  
Whistling and shrieking over him, as the glare  
Of searchlights scoured the darkness to blind day.  
He scrambled to his hands and knees ascare,  
Dragging his wounded foot through puddled clay,  
And tumbled in a hole a shell had scooped  
At random in a turnip-field between  
The unseen trenches where the foes lay cooped  
Through that unending battle of unseen,  
Dead-locked, league-stretching armies ; and quite  
spent  
He rolled upon his back within the pit,  
And lay secure, thinking of all it meant—  
His lying in that little hole, sore hit,  
But living, while across the starry sky  
Shrapnel and shell went screeching overhead—  
Of all it meant that he, Tom Dodd, should lie  
Among the Belgian turnips, while his bed . . .  
If it were he, indeed, who'd climbed each night,  
Fagged with the day's work, up the narrow stair,  
And slipt his clothes off in the candle-light,  
Too tired to fold them neatly on a chair

The way his mother'd taught him—too dog-tired  
After the long day's serving in the shop,  
Inquiring what each customer required,  
Politely talking weather, fit to drop . . .

And now for fourteen days and nights, at least,  
He hadn't had his clothes off, and had lain  
In muddy trenches, napping like a beast  
With one eye open, under sun and rain  
And that unceasing hell-fire . . .

It was strange  
How things turned out—the chances ! You'd just got  
To take your luck in life, you couldn't change  
Your luck.

And so here he was lying shot  
Who just six months ago had thought to spend  
His days behind a counter. Still, perhaps . . .  
And now, God only knew how he would end !

He'd like to know how many of the chaps  
Had won back to the trench alive, when he  
Had fallen wounded and been left for dead,  
If any ! . . .

This was different, certainly,  
From selling knots of tape and reels of thread  
And knots of tape and reels of thread and knots  
Of tape and reels of thread and knots of tape,  
Day in, day out, and answering "Have you got" s  
And "Do you keep" s, till there seemed no escape  
From everlasting serving in a shop,  
Inquiring what each customer required,  
Politely talking weather, fit to drop,  
With swollen ankles, tired . . .

But he was tired  
Now. Every bone was aching, and had ached  
For fourteen days and nights in that wet trench—  
Just duller when he slept than when he waked—  
Crouching for shelter from the steady drench  
Of shell and shrapnel . . .

That old trench, it seemed  
Almost like home to him. He'd slept and fed  
And sung and smoked in it, while shrapnel screamed  
And shells went whining harmless overhead—  
Harmless, at least, as far as he . . .

But Dick—  
Dick hadn't found them harmless yesterday,  
At breakfast, when he'd said he couldn't stick  
Eating dry bread, and crawled out the back way,  
And brought them butter in a lordly dish—  
Butter enough for all, and held it high,  
Yellow and fresh and clean as you could wish—  
When plump upon the plate from out the sky  
A shell fell bursting . . . Where the butter went,  
God only knew ! . . .

And Dick . . . He dared not think  
Of what had come to Dick . . . or what it meant—  
The shrieking and the whistling and the stink  
He'd lived in fourteen days and nights. 'Twas luck  
That he still lived . . . And queer how little then  
He seemed to care that Dick . . . Perhaps 'twas pluck  
That hardened him—a man among the men—  
Perhaps . . . Yet, only think things out a bit,  
And he was rabbit-livered, blue with funk !  
And he'd liked Dick . . . and yet when Dick was hit,  
He hadn't turned a hair. The meanest skunk



He should have thought would feel it when his mate  
Was blown to smithereens—Dick, proud as punch,  
Grinning like sin, and holding up the plate—  
But he had gone on munching his dry hunch,  
Unwinking, till he swallowed the last crumb.

Perhaps 'twas just because he dared not let  
His mind run upon Dick, who'd been his chum.  
He dared not now, though he could not forget.

Dick took his luck. And, life or death, 'twas luck  
From first to last ; and you'd just got to trust  
Your luck and grin. It wasn't so much pluck  
As knowing that you'd got to, when needs must,  
And better to die grinning . . .

Quiet now

Had fallen on the night. On either hand  
The guns were quiet. Cool upon his brow  
The quiet darkness brooded, as he scanned  
The starry sky. He'd never seen before  
So many stars. Although, of course, he'd known  
That there were stars, somehow before the war  
He'd never realised them—so thick-sown,  
Millions and millions. Serving in the shop,  
Stars didn't count for much ; and then at nights  
Strolling the pavements, dull and fit to drop,  
You didn't see much but the city lights.  
He'd never in his life seen so much sky  
As he'd seen this last fortnight. It was queer  
The things war taught you. He'd a mind to try  
To count the stars—they shone so bright and clear.  
One, two, three, four . . . Ah, God, but he was tired . .  
Five, six, seven, eight . .

Yes, it was number eight.  
And what was the next thing that she required ?  
(Too bad of customers to come so late,  
At closing-time !) Again within the shop  
He handled knots of tape and reels of thread,  
Politely talking weather, fit to drop . . .

When once again the whole sky overhead  
Flared blind with searchlights, and the shriek of shell  
And scream of shrapnel roused him. Drowsily  
He stared about him wondering. Then he fell  
Into deep dreamless slumber.

. . . . .  
He could see  
Two dark eyes peeping at him, ere he knew  
He was awake, and it again was day—  
An August morning burning to clear blue.  
The frightened rabbit scuttled . . .

Far away,  
A sound of firing . . . Up there, in the sky  
Big dragon-flies hung hovering . . . Snowballs burst  
About them . . .

Flies and snowballs ! With a cry  
He crouched to watch the airmen pass—the first  
That he'd seen under fire. Lord, that was pluck—  
Shells bursting all about them—and what nerve !  
They took their chance, and trusted to their luck.  
At such a dizzy height to dip and swerve,  
Dodging the shell-fire . . .

Hell ! but one was hit,  
And tumbling like a pigeon, plump . . .  
Thank Heaven,  
It righted, and then turned ; and after it

The whole flock followed safe—four, five, six, seven,  
Yes, they were all there safe. He hoped they'd win  
Back to their lines in safety. They deserved,  
Even if they were Germans . . . 'Twas no sin  
To wish them luck. Think how that beggar swerved  
Just in the nick of time !

He, too, must try  
To win back to the lines, though, likely as not,  
He'd take the wrong turn : but he couldn't lie  
For ever in that hungry hole and rot,  
He'd got to take his luck, to take his chance  
Of being sniped by foes or friends. He'd be  
With any luck in Germany or France  
Or Kingdom-come, next morning . . .

Drearily

The blazing day burnt over him—shot and shell  
Whistling and whining ceaselessly. But light  
Faded at last, and as the darkness fell  
He rose, and crawled away into the night.

## **SELECTIONS FROM 'FRIENDS'**

**RUPERT BROOKE**

### **SONNET IV.**

OCTOBER chestnuts showered their perishing gold  
Over us as beside the stream we lay  
In the Old Vicarage garden that blue day,  
Talking of verse and all the manifold  
Delights a little net of words may hold,  
While in the sunlight water-voles at play  
Dived under a trailing crimson bramble-spray,  
And walnuts thudded ripe on soft black mould.

Your soul goes down unto a darker stream  
Alone, O friend ; yet even in death's deep night  
Your eyes may grow accustomed to the dark,  
And Styx for you may have the ripple and gleam  
Of your familiar river, and Charon's bark  
Tarry by that old garden of your delight.

### **COLOUR**

A BLUE-BLACK Nubian plucking oranges  
At Jaffa by a sea of malachite  
In red tarboosh, green sash, and flowing white  
Burnous—among the shadowy memories

That haunt me yet by these bleak northern seas  
He lives for ever in my eyes' delight,  
Bizarre, superb in young immortal might—  
A god of old barbaric mysteries.

Maybe he lived a life of lies and lust :  
Maybe his bones are now but scattered dust  
Yet, for a moment he was life supreme  
Exultant and unchallenged : and my rhyme  
Would set him safely out of reach of time  
In that old heaven where things are what they seem.

### THE ORPHANS

At five o'clock one April morn  
I met them making tracks,  
Young Benjamin and Abel Horn,  
With bundles on their backs.

Young Benjamin is seventy-five,  
Young Abel, seventy-seven—  
The oldest innocents alive  
Beneath that April heaven.

I asked them why they trudged about  
With crabby looks and sour—  
“ And does your mother know you're out  
At this unearthly hour ? ”

They stopped : and scowling up at me  
Each shook a grizzled head,  
And swore ; and then spat bitterly,  
As with one voice they said :

" Homeless, about the country-side  
We never thought to roam ;  
But mother, she has gone and died,  
And broken up the home."

## MARRIAGE

GOING my way of old,  
Contented more or less  
I dreamt not life could hold  
Such happiness.

I dreamt not that love's way  
Could keep the golden height  
Day after happy day,  
Night after night.

## ROSES

RED roses floating in a crystal bowl  
You bring, O love ; and in your eyes I see,  
Blossom on blossom, your warm love of me  
Burning within the crystal of your soul—  
Red roses floating in a crystal bowl.

## HOME

### I. RETURN

UNDER the brown bird-haunted eaves of thatch  
The hollyhocks in crimson glory burned  
Against black timbers and old rosy brick,  
And over the green door in clusters thick

Hung tangled passion-flowers, when we returned  
To our own threshold : and with hand on latch,  
We stood a moment in the sunset gleam,  
And looked upon our home as in a dream.

Rapt in a golden glow of still delight,  
Together on the threshold in the sun  
We stood, rejoicing that we two had won  
To this deep golden peace ere day was done,  
That over gloomy plain and storm-swept height  
We two, O love, had won to home ere night.

## II. CANDLELIGHT

WHERE through the open window I could see  
The supper-table in the golden light  
Of tall white candles—brasses glinting bright  
On the black gleaming board, and crockery  
Coloured like gardens of old Araby—  
In your blue gown against the walls of white  
You stood adream, and in the starry night  
I felt strange loneliness steal over me.

You stood with eyes upon the candle flame  
That kindled your thick hair to burnished gold,  
As in a golden spell that seemed to hold  
My heart's love rapt from me for evermore . . .  
And then you stirred, and opening the door,  
Into the starry night you breathed my name.

## III. FIRELIGHT

AGAINST the curtained casement wind and sleet  
Rattle and thresh, while snug by our own fire

In dear companionship that naught may tire  
We sit—you listening, sewing in your seat,  
Half-dreaming in the glow of light and heat,  
I reading some old tale of love's desire  
That swept on gold wings to disaster dire,  
Then rose re-orient from black defeat.

I close the book, and louder yet the storm  
Threshes without. Your busy hands are still ;  
And on your face and hair the light is warm,  
As we sit gazing on the coals' red gleam  
In a gold glow of happiness, and dream  
Diviner dreams the years shall yet fulfil.

#### IV. MIDNIGHT

BETWEEN the midnight pillars of black elms  
The old moon hangs, a thin, cold, amber flame  
Over low ghostly mist : a lone snipe wheels  
Through shadowy moonshine, droning ; and there  
steals

Into my heart a fear without a name  
Out of primæval night's resurgent realms,  
Unearthly terror, chilling me with dread  
As I lie waking wide-eyed on the bed.

And then you turn towards me in your sleep  
Murmuring, and with a sigh of deep content  
You nestle to my breast ; and over me  
Steals the warm peace of you ; and, all fear spent,  
I hold you to me sleeping quietly,  
Till I, too, sink in slumber sound and deep.



## SELECTIONS FROM 'LIVELIHOOD'

### IN THE ORCHESTRA

HE'D played each night for months, and never heard  
A single tinkly tune, or caught a word  
Of all the silly songs and sillier jests ;  
And he'd seen nothing, even in the rests,  
Of that huge audience piled from floor to ceiling  
Whose stacked white faces sent his dazed wits reeling.  
He'd been too happy, and had other things  
To think of while he scraped his fiddlestrings. . . .

But now, he'd nothing left to think about—  
Nothing he dared to think of. . . .

In and out

The hollow fiddle of his head the notes  
Jingled and jangled ; and the raucous throats  
Of every star rasped jibes into his ear,—  
Each separate syllable, precise and clear,  
As though 'twere life or death if he should miss  
A single cackle, crow or quack, or hiss  
Of cockadoodling fools. . . .

A week ago

He'd sat beside her bed, and heard her low  
Dear voice talk softly of her hopes and fears—  
Their hopes and fears ; and every afternoon  
He'd watched her lying there. . . .

A fat buffoon  
In crimson trousers prancing, strut and cluck—  
Cackling : " A fellow never knows his luck.  
He never knows his luck. He never knows  
His luck." . . . And in and out the old gag goes  
Of either ear, and in out again,  
Playing at ' You-can't-catch-me ' through his brain—  
" 'Er knows his luck." . . .

How well they thought they knew  
Their luck, and such a short while since, they two  
Together. Life was lucky : and 'twas good  
Then to be fiddling for a livelihood—  
His livelihood and hers. . . .

A woman sang  
With grinning teeth. The whole house rocked and  
rang.

In the whole house there was no empty place :  
And there were grinning teeth in every face  
Of all those faces, grinning, tier on tier,  
From orchestra to ceiling chandelier,  
That caught in every prism a grinning light,  
As from the little black box up a height  
The changing limelight streamed down on the stage.  
And he was filled with reasonless, dull rage  
To see those grinning teeth, those grinning rows ;  
And wondered if those lips would never close,  
But gape for ever through an endless night,  
Grinning and mowing in the green limelight.

And now they seemed to grin in mockery  
Of him ; and then, as he turned suddenly  
To face them, flaming, it was his own face  
That mowed and grinned at him from every place—

Grimacing on him with the set, white grin  
 Of his own misery through that dazzling din. . . .  
 Yet, all the while he hadn't raised his head,  
 But fiddled, fiddled for his daily bread,  
 His livelihood—no longer hers. . . .

And now

He heard no more the racket and the row,  
 Nor saw the aching, glittering glare, nor smelt  
 The smother of hot breaths and smoke—but felt  
 A wet wind on his face. . . .

He sails again

Home with her up the river in the rain—  
 Leaving the grey domes and grey colonnades  
 Of Greenwich in their wake as daylight fades—  
 By huge, dark, cavernous wharves with flaring lights,  
 Warehouses built for some mad London night's  
 Fantastic entertainment—grimmer far  
 Than Bagdad dreamt of—monstrous and bizarre,  
 They loom against the night, and seem to hold  
 Preposterous secrets horrible and old  
 Behind black doors and windows.

Yet even they

Make magic with more mystery the way,  
 As, hand in hand, they sail through the blue gloam  
 Up the old river of enchantment, home. . . .

He heard strange, strangled voices—he, alone  
 Once more—like voices through the telephone,  
 Thin and unreal, inarticulate  
 Twanging and clucking at terrific rate—  
 Pattering, pattering. . . .

And again aware

He grew of all the racket and the glare,

Aware again of the antic strut and cluck—  
And there was poor old ' Never-know-his-luck ' .  
Doing another turn—yet, not a smile,  
Although he'd changed his trousers and his style.  
The same old trousers and the same old wheeze  
Was what the audience liked. He tried to please,  
And knew he failed : and suddenly turned old  
Before those circling faces glum and cold—  
A fat old man with cracked voice piping thin,  
Trying to make those wooden faces grin,  
With frantic kicks and desperate wagging head,  
To win the applause that meant his daily bread—  
Gagging and prancing for a livelihood,  
His daily bread. . . .

God ! how he understood !  
He'd fiddled for their livelihood—for her,  
And for the one who never came. . . .

A stir

Upon the stage ; and now another turn—  
The old star guttered out, too old to burn.  
And he remembered she had liked the chap  
When she'd been there that night. He'd seen her  
clap,  
Laughing so merrily. She liked it all—  
The razzle-dazzle of the music-hall—  
And laughing faces . . . said she liked to see  
Hard-working people laughing heartily  
After the day's work. She liked everything—  
His playing, even ! Snap . . . another string—  
The third !

And she'd been happy in that place,  
Seeing a friendly face in every face.

That was her way—the whole world was her friend.  
 And she'd been happy, happy to the end,  
 As happy as the day was long.

And he

Fiddled on, dreaming of her quietly.

### THE PLOUGH

HE sniffed the clean and eager smell  
 Of crushed wild garlic, as he thrust  
 Beneath the shallows ; and a spell  
 He stood there munching a thick crust—  
 The fresh tang giving keener zest  
 To bread and cheese—and watched a pair  
 Of wagtails preening wing and breast,  
 Then running—flirting tails in air,  
 And pied plumes sleeked to silky sheen—  
 Chasing each other in and out  
 The wet wild garlic's white and green.

And then remembering, with a shout,  
 And rattle whirring, he ran back  
 Again into the Fair Maid's Mead,  
 To scare the rascal thieves and black  
 That flocked from far and near to feed  
 Upon the sprouting grain. As one  
 They rose with clapping, rustling wings—  
 Rooks, starlings, pigeons, in the sun  
 Circling about him in wide rings,  
 And plovers hovering over him  
 In mazy, interweaving flight—  
 Until it made his young wits swim

To see them up against the light,  
A dazzling dance of black and white  
Against the clear blue April sky—  
Wings on wings in flashing flight  
Swooping low and soaring high—  
Swooping, soaring, fluttering, flapping,  
Tossing, tumbling, swerving, dipping,  
Chattering, cawing, creaking, clapping,  
Till he felt his senses slipping,  
And gripped his corncrake rattle tight,  
And flourished it above his head  
Till every bird was out of sight ;  
And laughed, when all had flown and fled,  
To think that he, and all alone,  
Could put so many thieves to rout.

Then sitting down upon a stone  
He wondered if the school were out—  
The school where, only yesterday,  
He'd sat at work among his mates—  
At work that now seemed children's play,  
With pens and pencils, books and slates ;  
Although he'd liked it well enough,  
The hum and scuffling of the school,  
And hadn't cared when Grim-and-Gruff  
Would call him dunderhead and fool.

And he could see them sitting there,  
His class-mates, in the lime-washed room,  
With fingers inked and towzled hair—  
Bill Baxter with red cheeks abloom,  
And bright black eyes ; and Ginger Jim  
With freckled face and solemn look,

Who'd wink a pale blue eye at him,  
 Then sit intent upon his book,  
 While, caught a-giggle, he was caned.

He'd liked that room, he'd liked it all—  
 The window steaming when it rained ;  
 The sunlight dancing on the wall  
 Among the glossy charts and maps ;  
 The blotchy stain beside the clock  
 That only he of all the chaps  
 Knew for a chart of Dead Man's Rock  
 That lies in Tiger Island Bay—  
 The reef on which the schooners split  
 And founder, that would bear away  
 The treasure-chest of Cut-Throat-Kit,  
 That's buried under Black Bill's bones  
 Beneath the purple pepper-tree . . .  
 A trail of clean-sucked cherry-stones,  
 Which you must follow carefully,  
 Across the dunes of yellow sand  
 Leads winding upward from the beach  
 Till, with a pistol in each hand,  
 And cutlass 'twixt your teeth, you reach . . .

Plumping their fat crops peacefully  
 Were plovers, pigeons, starlings, rooks,  
 Feeding on every side while he  
 Was in the land of storybooks.  
 He raised his rattle with a shout  
 And scattered them with yell and crake. . . .  
 A man must mind what he's about  
 And keep his silly wits awake,

Not go wool-gathering, if he'd earn  
His wage. And soon, no schoolboy now,  
He'd take on a man's job, and learn  
To build a rick, and drive the plough,  
Like father. . . .

Up against the sky,  
Beyond the spinney and the stream,  
With easy stride and steady eye  
He saw his father drive his team,  
Turning the red marl gleaming wet  
Into long furrows clean and true ;  
And dreaming there, he longed to set  
His young hand to the ploughshare too.

## THE NEWS

THE buzzer boomed, and instantly the clang  
Of hammers dropt, just as the fendered bow  
Bumped with soft splash against the wharf,—though  
now

Again within the Yard a hammer rang—  
A solitary hammer striking steel  
Somewhere aloft—and strangely, stridently  
Echoed as though it struck the steely sky,  
The low, cold, steely sky.

She seemed to feel  
That hammer in her heart—blow after blow  
In a strange, clanging hollow seemed to strike,  
Monotonous, unrelenting, cruel-like—  
Her heart that such a little while ago  
Had been so full, so happy with its news  
Scarce uttered even to itself.



It stopt,  
 That dreadful hammer. And the silence dropt  
 Again a moment. Then a clatter of shoes  
 And murmur of voices as the men trooped out ;  
 And as each wife with basket and hot can  
 Hurried towards the gate to meet her man,  
 She too ran forward, and then stood in doubt  
 Because among them all she could not see  
 The face that usually was first of all  
 To meet her eyes.

Against the grimy wall  
 That towered black above her to the sky,  
 With trembling knuckles to the cold stone pressed  
 Till the grit seemed to eat into the bone,  
 And her stretched arm to shake the solid stone,  
 She stood, and strove to calm her troubled breast—  
 Her breast, whose trouble of strange happiness,  
 So sweet and so miraculous, as she  
 Had stood among the chattering company  
 Upon the ferry-boat, to strange distress  
 Was changed. An unknown terror seemed to lie  
 For her behind that wall, so cold and hard  
 And black above her, in the unseen Yard,  
 Dreadfully quiet now.

Then with a sigh  
 Of glad relief she ran towards the gate  
 As he came slowly out, the last of all.

The terror of the hammer and the wall  
 Fell from her as, a woman to her mate,  
 She moved with happy heart and smile of greeting—  
 A young and happy wife whose only thought

Was whether he would like the food she'd brought—  
Whose one desire, to watch her husband eating.

With a grave smile he took his bait from her,  
And then without a word they moved away  
To where some grimy baulks of timber lay  
Beside the river, and 'twas quieter  
Than in the crowd of munching, squatting men  
And chattering wives and children. As he ate,  
With absent eyes upon the river set,  
She chattered too a little now and then  
Of household happenings ; and then silently  
They sat and watched the grimy-flowing stream,  
Dazed by the stunning din of hissing steam  
Escaping from an anchored boat hard by,  
Each busy with their own thoughts, who till now  
Had shared each thought, each feeling, speaking out  
Easily, eagerly, without a doubt,  
As happy, innocent children, anyhow,  
The innermost secrets of their wedded life.  
So as the dinner-hour went quickly by  
They sat there for the first time, troubled, shy—  
A silent husband and a silent wife.  
But she was only troubled by excess  
Of happiness ; and as she watched the stream,  
She looked upon her life as in a dream,  
Recalling all its tale of happiness  
Unbroken and unshadowed since she'd met  
Her man the first time, eighteen months ago. . . .

A keen blue day with sudden flaws of snow  
And sudden sunshine, when she first had set  
Her wondering eyes upon him—gaily clad

For football in a jersey green and red,  
 Knees bare beneath white shorts, his curly head  
 Wind-blown and wet—and knew him for her lad.  
 He strode towards her down the windy street—  
 The wet grey pavements flashing sudden gold,  
 And gold the unending coils of smoke that rolled  
 Unceasingly overhead, fired by a fleet,  
 Wild glint of glancing sunlight. On he came  
 Beside her brother—still a raw, uncouth  
 Young hobbledehoy—a strapping, mettled youth  
 In the first pride of manhood, that wild flame  
 Touching his hair to fire, his cheeks aglow  
 With the sharp stinging wind, his arms aswing ;  
 And as she watched, she felt the tingling sting  
 Of flying flakes, and in a whirl of snow  
 A moment he was hidden from her sight.  
 It passed, and then before she was aware,  
 With white flakes powdering his ruddy hair  
 He stood before her, laughing in the light,  
 In all his bravery of red and green  
 Snow-sprinkled ; and she laughed too. In the sun  
 They laughed : and in that laughter they were one.

Now as with kindled eyes on the unseen  
 Grey river she sat gazing, she again  
 Lived through that moment in a golden dream . . .  
 And then quite suddenly she saw the stream  
 Distinct in its cold, grimy flowing—then  
 The present with its deeper happiness  
 Thrilled her afresh—this wonder strange and new—  
 This dream in her young body coming true,  
 Incredible, yet certain none-the-less—  
 This news, scarce broken to herself, that she

Must break to him. She longed to see his eyes  
Kindle to hear it, happy with surprise  
When she should break it to him presently.

But she must wait a while yet. Still too strange,  
Too wonderful for words, she could not share  
Even with him her secret. He sat there  
So quietly, little dreaming of the change  
That had come over her—but when he knew !  
For he was always one for bairns, was John,  
And this would be his own, their own. There shone  
A strange new light on all since this was true,  
All, all seemed strange, the river and the shore,  
The barges and the wharves with timber piled,  
And all her world, familiar from a child,  
Was as a world she'd never seen before.

And he, too, sat with eyes upon the stream  
Remembering that day when first the light  
Of her young eyes with laughter sparkling bright  
Kindled to his ; and as he caught the gleam  
The life within him quickened suddenly  
To fire, and in a world of golden laughter  
They stood alone together ; and then after,  
When he was playing with his mates and he  
Hurtled headlong towards the goal, he knew  
Her eyes were on him ; and for her alone,  
Who had the merriest eyes he'd ever known,  
He played that afternoon. Though until then  
He'd only played to please himself, somehow  
She seemed to have a hold upon him, now.  
No longer a boy, a man among grown men,  
He'd never have a thought apart from her,  
From her, his mate . . .

And then that golden night  
 When, in a whirl of melody and light,  
 Her merry brown eyes flashing merrier,  
 They rode together in a gilded car  
 That seemed to roll for ever round and round  
 In a blind blaze of light and blare of sound,  
 For ever and for ever, till afar  
 It seemed to bear them from the surging throng  
 Of lads and lasses happy in release  
 From the week's work in yards and factories—  
 For ever through a land of light and song,  
 While they sat, rapt in silence, hand in hand,  
 And looked into each other's merry eyes,  
 They two, together, whirled through Paradise,  
 A golden, glittering, unearthly land,  
 A land where light and melody were one,  
 And melody and light a golden fire  
 That ran through their young bodies, and desire,  
 A golden music streaming from the sun,  
 Filling their veins with golden melody  
 And singing fire . . .

And then when quiet fell,  
 And they together, with so much to tell,  
 So much to tell each other instantly,  
 Left the hot throng and roar and glare behind,  
 Seeking the darker streets, and stood at last  
 In a dark lane where footsteps seldom passed,  
 Lit by a far lamp and one glowing blind  
 That seemed to make the darkness yet more dark  
 Between the cliffs of houses, black and high,  
 That soared above them to the starry sky,  
 A deep blue sky where spark on fiery spark

The stars for them were kindled, as they raised  
Their eyes in new-born wonder to the night ;  
And in a solitude of cold starlight  
They stood alone together, hushed, and gazed  
Into each other's eyes until speech came ;  
And underneath the stars they talked and talked . . .

Then he remembered how they two had walked  
Along a beach that was one golden flame  
Of yellow sand beside a flame-blue sea,  
The day they wedded, that strange day of dream,  
One flame of blue and gold . . .

The murky stream

Flowed once again before his eyes, and he  
Dropt back into the present ; and he knew  
That he must break the news that suddenly  
Had come to him last night, as drowsily  
He lay beside her—startling, stern and true,  
Out of the darkness flashing. He must tell  
How, as he lay beside her in the night,  
His heart had told him he must go and fight,  
Must throw up everything he loved so well  
To go and fight in lands across the sea  
Beside the other lads—must throw up all,  
His work, his home. . . .

The shadow of the wall

Fell on her once again, and stridently  
That hammer struck her heart, as from the stream  
She raised her eyes to his, and saw their flame—  
Then back into her heart her glad news came  
As John smiled on her ; and her golden dream  
Once more was all about her as she thought

## 116 SELECTIONS FROM 'LIVELIHOOD'

Of home, the new home that the future held  
For them—they three together. Fear was quelled  
By this new happiness that all unsought  
Had sprung from the old happiness. . . .

And he,  
Watching her, thought of home too. When he stepped  
With her across the threshold first, and slept  
That first night in her arms so quietly,  
For the first time in all his life he'd known  
All that home meant, or nearly all—for yet  
Each night brought him new knowledge as she met  
Him, smiling on the clean, white threshold stone,  
When he returned from labour in the Yard. . . .  
And she'd be waiting for him soon, while he  
Was fighting with his fellows oversea—  
She would be waiting for him . . .

It was hard  
For him that he must go, as go he must,  
But harder far for her : things always fell  
Harder upon the women. It was well  
She didn't dream yet. . . . He could only trust  
She, too, would feel that he had got to go,  
Then 'twould not be so hard to go, and yet . . .  
Dreaming, he saw the lamplit table, set  
With silver pot and cups and plates aglow  
For tea in their own kitchen bright and snug,  
With her behind the teapot—saw it all,  
The coloured calendars upon the wall,  
The bright fire-irons, and the gay hearthrug  
She'd made herself from gaudy rags ; his place  
Awaiting him, with something hot-and-hot—  
His favourite sausages as like as not,

Between two plates for him—as, with clean face  
Glowing from washing in the scullery,  
And such a hunger on him, he would sink  
Content into his chair . . .

'Twas strange to think  
All this was over, and so suddenly—  
'Twas strange, and hard . . .

Still gazing on the stream,  
Her thoughts, too, were at home. She heard the  
patter  
Of tiny feet beside her, and the chatter  
Of little tongues . . .

Then loudly through their dream  
The buzzer boomed ; and all about them rose  
The men and women : soon the wives were on  
The ferry-boat, now puffing to be gone ;  
The husbands hurrying, ere the gates should close,  
Back to the Yard. . . .

She, in her dream of gold,  
And he, in his new desolation, stood.  
Then soberly, as wife and husband should,  
They parted, with their news as yet untold.

## STRAWBERRIES

SINCE four she had been plucking strawberries ;  
And it was only eight now, and the sun  
Already blazing. There'd be little ease  
For her until the endless day was done. . . .

Yet, why should she have any ease, while he—  
While he . . .



But there, she mustn't think of him,  
 Fighting beneath that burning sun, maybe—  
 His rifle nigh red-hot, and every limb  
 Aching for sleep, the sweat dried on his brow,  
 And baking in the blaze, and such a thirst,  
 Prickly and choking, she could feel it now  
 In her own throat. He'd said it was the worst,  
 In his last letter, worst of all to bear,  
 That burning thirst—that, and the hellish noise. . . .

And she was plucking strawberries ; and there  
 In the cool shadow of the elm their boys,  
 Their baby-boys, were sleeping quietly. . . .  
 But she was aching too : her head and back  
 Were one hot blinding ache ; and dizzily  
 Sometimes across her eyes the light swam black  
 With dancing spots of red . . .

So ripe and sweet  
 Among their fresh green leaves the strawberries lay,  
 Although the earth was baking in the heat,  
 Burning her soles—and yet the summer day  
 Was young enough !

If she could only cram  
 A handful of fresh berries sweet and cool  
 Into his mouth, while he . . .

A red light swam  
 Before her eyes . . .

She mustn't think, poor fool,  
 What he'd be doing now, or she'd go crazed . . .  
 Then what would happen to them left alone—  
 The little lads !

And he would be fair 'mazed,  
 When he came back, to see how they had grown,

William and Dick, and how they talked. Two year  
Since he had gone—and he had never set  
His eyes upon his youngest son. 'Twas queer  
To think he hadn't seen his baby yet—  
And it nigh fourteen months old.

Everything  
Was queer in these days. She could never guess  
How it had come about that he could bring  
Himself to go and fight. 'Twas little less  
Than murder to have taken him, and he  
So mild and easy-tempered, never one  
For drink or picking quarrels hastily . . .

And now he would be fighting in that sun . . .  
'Twas quite beyond her. Yet, somehow, it seemed  
He'd got to go. She couldn't understand . . .  
When they had married, little had they dreamed  
What things were coming to ! In all the land  
There was no gentler husband . . .

It was queer :  
She couldn't get the rights of it, no way.  
She thought and thought, but couldn't get it clear  
Why he'd to leave his own work—making hay  
'Twould be this weather—leave his home, and all,  
His wife and his young family, and go  
To fight in foreign lands, and maybe fall,  
Fighting another lad he didn't know,  
And had no quarrel with. . . .

The world was mad,  
Or she was going crazy. Anyhow  
She couldn't see the rights of it . . . Her lad  
Had thought it right to go, she knew . . .

But now

She mustn't think about it all. . . . And so  
She'd best stop puzzling, and pluck strawberries. . . .

And every woman plucking in the row  
Had husband, son, or brother overseas.

Men seemed to see things differently : and still  
She wondered sore if even they knew why  
They went themselves, almost against their will. . . .

But sure enough, that was her baby's cry.  
'Twas feeding-time ; and she'd be glad to rest  
Her back a bit. It always gave her ease,  
To feel her baby feeding at her breast,  
And pluck to go on gathering strawberries.

## THE DOCTOR

HE'D soon be home. The car was running well,  
Considering what she'd been through, since the bell  
Tumbled him out again—just as his head  
Sank in the pillow, glad to get to bed  
After the last night's watching, and a day  
Of travelling snowy roads without a stay—  
To find the tall young shepherd at the door.

"The wife's gey bad in child-bed"—and no more  
He'd said till they were seated in the car,  
And he was asked, Where to ? and was it far ?  
"The Scalp," he'd said—"some fifteen mile or so."

And they'd set out through blinding squalls of snow  
To climb the hills. The car could scarcely crawl  
At times, she skidded so ; and with that squall  
Clean in his eyes he scarcely saw to steer—  
His big lamps only lit a few yards clear.

But those young eyes beside him seemed to pierce  
The fifteen miles of smother fuming fierce  
Between the husband and his home—the light  
In that far bedroom window held his sight,  
As though he saw clean through the blinding squall  
To the little square stone steading that held all  
His heart—so solitary, bleak, and grey  
Among the snowdrifts on the windy braise,  
Beyond the burn that, swollen, loud, and black,  
Threatened the single plank that kept the track  
Between them and the outside world secure.  
If that were gone when he got back, for sure  
They'd have to plunge waist-deep in that black spate  
And cling for life upon the old sheep-gate,  
If it were not gone too, to cross at all. . . .

And she ! He saw the shadow on the wall  
Behind the bed, his mother's, as she bent  
To comfort Mary, for a moment spent  
By the long agony . . . That shadow seemed  
So black and threatening, and the candle gleamed  
So strangely in those wild bright eyes. . . .

They'd be

Lucky to reach the bank at all ; for he  
Had been through that burn once on such a night,  
And he remembered how he'd had to fight

The frothing flood, rolled over, beaten, bruised,  
 And well-nigh dragged down under, though well used  
 To every mood and temper of the burn.

Yet, though he gazed so far, he missed no turn  
 In all those climbing miles of snow-blind way  
 Until the car stopt dead by Gallows' Brae,  
 And they'd to leave her underneath a dyke,  
 And plunge knee-deep through drift-choked slack and  
     syke

Until they reached the plank that still held fast,  
 Though quivering underfoot in that wild blast  
 Like a stretched clothes' line. Dizzily they crossed  
 Above that brawling blackness, torn and tossed  
 To flashing spray about the lantern. Then,  
 Setting their teeth, they took the brae, like men  
 At desperate hazard charging certain death ;  
 And nigh the crest the doctor reeled, his breath  
 Knocked out of him, and sinking helplessly,  
 Knew nothing till he wakened drowsily  
 Before the peat and found himself alone  
 In a strange kitchen.

But a heavy moan  
 Just overhead recalled him, and he leapt  
 Instantly to his feet, alert, and crept  
 Upstairs with noiseless step until he came  
 To the low bedroom where the candle flame  
 Showed the old woman standing by the bed  
 On which the young wife lay. His noiseless tread  
 Scarce startling them, he paused a moment while  
 Those strained white lips and wild eyes strove to  
     smile

Bravely and tenderly as the husband bent  
Over the bed to kiss her. When he went  
Without a word, closing the creaking door  
And creeping quietly downstairs, once more  
The room was filled with moaning.

. . . . .

When at last

His part was done, and danger safely past,  
And into a wintry world with lusty crying  
That little life had ventured, and was lying  
Beside the drowsy mother on the bed,  
Downstairs the doctor stole with noiseless tread,  
And, entering the kitchen quietly,  
Saw the young father gazing fearfully  
Into the fire with dazed, unseeing eyes.  
He spoke to him ; and still he did not rise,  
But sat there staring with that senseless gaze  
Set on the peat that with a sudden blaze  
Lit up his drawn face, bloodless 'neath its tan.  
But when the doctor stooped and touched the man  
Upon the shoulder, starting to his feet  
He staggered, almost falling in the peat,  
Whispering ' She's safe ! She's safe ! '

And then he leapt

Suddenly up the stair. The doctor crept  
Speedily after him without a sound ;  
But when he reached the upper room he found  
He wasn't needed. The young husband bent  
Over his wife and baby, quiet, content ;  
Then the wife stirred, opening her eyes, and smiled,  
And they together looked upon their child.

The doctor drowsed till dawn beside the peat,  
 Napping uneasily in the high-backed seat,  
 Half-conscious of the storm that shook the pane  
 And rattled at the door. . . .

And now again

He seemed to stand beside the lonely bed  
 He'd stood beside last night—the old man, dead,  
 With staring eyes, dropt jaw, and rigid grin  
 That held the stark white features, peaked and thin—  
 The old man, left alone, with not a friend  
 To make his body seemly in the end,  
 Or close his eyes . . .

And then the lusty cry

Of that young baby screaming hungrily  
 Broke through his dream.

. . . . .

The car was running well.

He'd soon be home, and sleeping—till the bell  
 Should rouse him to a world of old men dying  
 Alone, and hungry new-born babies crying.

*SELECTIONS FROM 'WHIN'*

"O WHAT SAW YOU ? "

O WHAT saw you in Flanders  
Fighting for the king ?  
Rain and mud, and mud and rain,  
And never another thing.

O what saw you in Babylon  
Fighting for the king ?  
Sun and sand, and sand and sun,  
And never another thing.

Are there no burns in Flanders,  
No tumbling burns that sing ?  
Are there no braes in Babylon  
Bonnie with broom and ling ?

There are no burns in Flanders,  
No tumbling burns that sing ;  
There are no braes in Babylon  
Bonnie with broom and ling.

Then I'll not go to Flanders  
Nor yet to Babylon,  
But keep to my own country's  
Clean rain and kindly sun.



Who will may dream of Bagdad  
And sigh for Samarkand—  
I'll live content with the windy bent  
Of green Northumberland.

### THIRLWALL

In the last gleam of Winter sun  
A hundred starlings scream and screele  
Among the ragged firs that stand  
About the ruined Pele.

Bright singing birds of gold they were  
To me when last, a little boy,  
I came from Thirlwall, and they shook  
The very sky with joy.

Still in that gleam of Winter sun  
A hundred starlings scream and screele  
For ever in the ragged firs  
About the ruined Pele.

### NORTHUMBERLAND

HEATHERLAND and bent-land—  
Black land and white,  
God bring me to Northumberland,  
The land of my delight.

Land of singing waters,  
And winds from off the sea,  
God bring me to Northumberland,  
The land where I would be.

Heatherland and bent-land,  
And valleys rich with corn,  
God bring me to Northumberland,  
The land where I was born.

## PEDLAR JACK

I CAME by Raw from Hungry Law,  
When who should pass me by  
But Pedlar Jack, with a pack on his back  
And a patch across his eye.

I came by Raw from Hungry Law,  
And heard the Pedlar cry :  
“ I’ve got in my pack the thing you lack—  
The Song of a Sparkling Eye.”

“ O Pedlar Jack with the pack on your back,  
Since Sally and I did part  
I’ve saved up farthings four to buy  
The Song of a Broken Heart.”

“ If you want the Song of a Broken Heart,  
You go elsewhere to buy ;  
For I have never a song in my pack  
But the Song of a Sparkling Eye.”

“ O what know I of a sparkling eye,  
Since Sally and I did part ? ”

“ And what should Jack the Pedlar know  
Of the Song of a Broken Heart ? ”

I came by Raw from Hungry Law,  
When who should pass me by

But Pedlar Jack, with a pack on his back  
And a patch across his eye.

### THE LONELY TREE

A TWISTED ash, a ragged fir,  
A silver birch with leaves astir.

Men talk of forests broad and deep,  
Where summer-long the shadows sleep.

Though I love forests deep and wide,  
The lone tree on the bare hill-side,

The brave, wind-bitten, lonely tree,  
Is rooted in the heart of me.

A twisted ash, a ragged fir,  
A silver birch with leaves astir.

### LAMENT

WE who are left, how shall we look again  
Happily on the sun, or feel the rain,  
Without remembering how they who went  
Ungrudgingly, and spent  
Their all for us, loved, too, the sun and rain ?

A bird among the rain-wet lilac sings—  
But we, how shall we turn to little things  
And listen to the birds and winds and streams  
Made holy by their dreams,  
Nor feel the heart-break in the heart of things ?

## *SELECTIONS FROM 'NEIGHBOURS'*

### BETTY RIDDLE

As she sits at her stall in the Martinmas Fair  
With a patched blue umbrella slung over her chair,  
Old Betty Riddle sells  
Greenjacks and jargonels,  
Fixing some ghost of old days with her stare.

“ A ha’p’orth of greenjacks ! ” each little boy cries,  
Devouring six-penn’orth at least with his eyes :  
Into his grubby hands  
Pears drop as still he stands ;  
But she gives him no glance as he munches his prize.

While mumbling and mowing she sits all the day,  
And her mellow green pyramids dwindle away,  
Folk in the roundabout  
Racket and skirl and shout ;  
Yet never a word to it all does she say.

And even if, when her whole stock-in-trade’s bought,  
Some laughing lad’s eye by that cold stare is caught,  
Glumly away he’ll slink,  
Too dull of wit to think  
Of offering a penny to her for her thought.

130 SELECTIONS FROM 'NEIGHBOURS'

And soon they forget her, the lads without sense ;  
Yet the thought that is burning that blue and intense  
Past-piercing steely eye,  
Blind to the passer-by,  
Must be worth a deal more than the pears and the  
pence.

Still staring she sits as the slow quarters chime  
Till the raw fog has covered her bare boards with  
rime—  
Crazy old wife who sells  
Greenjacks and jargonels—  
Having buried three husbands in all in her time.

RALPH LILBURN

THE night we took the bees out to the heather,  
The sealed hives stacked behind us, as together  
We rode in the jingly jolting cart, were humming  
Like the far-murmuring rumour of blown branches.

White in the moon-flame was the flowering heather  
And white the sandy trackway, as together  
We travelled, and a dewy scent of honey  
Hung in the warm, white, windless air of midnight.

A silvery trackway through moon-silvered heather  
To the humming dark of the hives we'll ride together  
For evermore through murmurous dewy midnight,  
My heart, a hive of honey-scented moonlight.

## CHAMBERS

THE labyrinthine corridors of my mind  
Between dead, lightless, many-chambered walls  
In endless mazes of confusion wind ;  
And only now and again the live ray falls,  
Touching the secret spring of some hid door  
With magic, and flings open some unknown  
Chamber of light wherein there dwells alone  
Beauty or terror never glimpsed before.

Could but that ray through all the chambers glow  
Once and for ever till my mind should burn  
One sunlike sphere of still celestial light !  
But only rarely, opening out of turn,  
Two neighbouring doors spring wide at once and show  
Beauty and terror together in the night.

## DRIFTWOOD

BLACK spars of driftwood burn to peacock flames,  
Sea-emeralds and sea-purples and sea-blues,  
And all the innumerable ever-changing hues  
That haunt the changeless deeps but have no names,  
Flicker and spire in our enchanted sight :  
And as we gaze, the unsearchable mystery,  
The unfathomed, cold, salt magic of the sea,  
Shines clear before us in the quiet night.

We know the secret that Ulysses sought,  
That moonstruck mariners since time began  
Snatched at a drowning hazard—strangely brought

To our home-keeping hearts in drifting spars  
 We chanced to kindle under the cold stars—  
 The secret of the ocean-heart of man.

### NOEL DARK

SHE sleeps in bronze, the Helen of his dream,  
 Within the quiet of my little room,  
 Touched by a kindling birch-log's fitful gleam  
 To tenderer beauty in the rosy gloom.

She sleeps in bronze ; and he who fashioned her,  
 Shaping the wet clay with such eager joy,  
 Slumbers as soundly where the cold winds stir  
 The withered tussocks on the plains of Troy.

### REVEILLE

STILL bathed in its moonlight slumber the little white  
 house by the cedar  
 Stands silent against the red dawn ;  
 And nothing I know of who sleeps there, to the travail  
 of day yet unwakened,  
 Behind the blue curtains undrawn ;

But I dream as we march down the roadway, ringing  
 loud and rime-white in the moonlight,  
 Of a little dark house on a hill  
 Wherein when the battle is over, to the rapture of day  
 yet unwakened,  
 We shall slumber as dreamless and still.

## THESSALY

SUN-STEEPED translucent marble, and beyond,  
Pale marble hills of amethyst and rose  
Above the shadowy olive-grove, that shows  
A sea-green shimmer like a tide-left pond  
Of brackish waters under the pale blue sky  
Of the unclouded noon of Thessaly ;  
And over that pallid sky and pallid sea  
Obviously the sultry hours drift by—  
Drift by in sun-steeped and translucent dream,  
Till suddenly a seagull's strident scream  
Stabs through my sense, and once again I ride  
In a little coble the dark tossing tide  
Of glancing, shivering, Northern seas, a boy  
Chanting to that dark sky the tale of Troy.

## WINDOWS

## I

THE hills of Wales burned only dimmer gold  
Beneath gold skies, as over the green shires  
I looked from my high window on the fires  
Of sunset kindling ; but they could not hold  
My vagrant thought that in an instant leapt  
To a window overseas that, from a height,  
Looks down an alley where a girl one night  
Was done to death while, knowing naught, I slept.

And brooding in my chair I wonder why  
The golden uplands and the glistening sky



Should bring that horror of the dark to mind,  
 And in my consciousness I seek to trace  
 The ray that glimmers through dark ways and blind  
 Between the sunset and a dead girl's face.

## II

If I could live within the ray of light  
 That runs through all things everlastingly—  
 Not only glimpse in moments of clear sight  
 The glancing of the golden shuttles that ply  
 'Twixt things diverse in seeming, stars and mud,  
 Innocence and the deed in darkness done,  
 The victim and the spiller of the blood—  
 The light that weaves the universe in one,

Then might my heart have ease and rest content  
 On the golden upland under the clear sky :  
 But ever must my restless days be spent  
 Following the fugitive gleam until I die—  
 Light-shotten darkness, glory struck from strife,  
 Terror to beauty kindling, death to life.

## DREAM-COME-TRUE

DEAREST, while it would sometimes seem  
 As if I really had the art  
 Of putting into words the dream  
 That fill's another's heart ;

And though in its own dream-come-true  
 My heart sings ever like a bird's,  
 The wonder of my life with you  
 I cannot put in words.

## MICHAEL

WHY should he wake up chuckling ? Only hark !  
Chuckle on chuckle, lying in the dark  
Alone in his little cot. What may there be  
That we for all our wisdom cannot see,  
Gazing grave-eyed, in the old heart of night  
To fill his baby heart with such delight ?

## THE STAIR

DEAR, when you climbed the icy Matterhorn,  
Or braved the crouching green-eyed jungle-night-  
With heart exultant in the sheer white light  
Of the snow-peak, or cowering forlorn  
In the old Indian darkness terror-torn—  
Had you no inkling on that crystal height,  
Or in the shuddering gloom, how on a flight  
Of London stairs we'd meet one Winter's morn ?

And when we met, dear, did you realise  
That as I waited, watching you descend,  
Glad in the sunlight of your eyes and hair,  
And you the first time looked into my eyes,  
Your wanderings were done, and on that stair  
I too, O love, had reached the journey's end ?

## SONG

I LONG to shape in stone  
What life has meant to me,

That my delight be known  
To all eternity.

Though in love's praise I give  
To time frail words alone,  
Yet may not song outlive  
All perishable stone ?

SELECTIONS FROM 'I HEARD A  
SAILOR'

NED NIXON AND HIS MAGGIE

*Will you come with me, Maggie, to Stagshaw Bank Fair ?*  
Come with you where—come with you where ?  
Do you fancy a lass has naught better to do  
Than to go gallivanting, Ned Nixon, with you ?

*If you come with me, Maggie, I'll buy you a ring.*  
You'll do no such thing—you'll do no such thing.  
Do you fancy I'd let my lad squander his pence  
On tokens and trinkets and such-like nonsense ?

*Come, Maggie, come, Maggie, we're only once young !*  
Now hold your fool's tongue—now hold your fool's  
tongue !

If we're only young once it behoves us to be  
A common-sense couple and act cannily.

*Time enough, Maggie, for sense when we're old.*  
Does copper turn gold—does copper turn gold,  
Or a guff turn wiseacre at three-score-and-ten ?  
Anyhow, I'm for taking no chances with men.

*Then must I go lonesome to Stagshaw Bank Fair ?*  
What do I care—what do I care ?  
But if you go lonesome I'd have you to know  
It's lonesome the rest of your life you will go.

## GIRL'S SONG

I WAS so happy that I hardly knew it,  
 Nor ever guessed that life was not all play,  
 And little dreamt I'd live to see the dawning  
 Of such a day—  
 Oh why, why should it be  
 That suddenly  
 Life should seem strange and terrible to me ?

I'd never cared for lads like other lasses  
 Nor heeded overmuch what they might say,  
 And little dreamt I'd live to see the dawning  
 Of such a day—  
 Oh why, why should it be  
 That suddenly  
 A lad's word should mean life and death to me ?

## THE BURIED CAMP

FEAR not : the dead are dead,  
 And fallen pomp and power  
 Leave no pale ghosts to prowl  
 Above their earthly bed :  
 'Twas no dead Roman but a living owl  
 That startled us beside the ruined tower.

*And yet, that beak, those eyes  
 That blazed out from the night !  
 Surely 'twas Cæsar's soul  
 That with sharp stabbing cries  
 Swept by, as through the buried camp we stole,  
 Spurring dead cohorts on to one last fight.*

## DROWNED AT SEA

His fathers sleep in steadfast graves  
Under the unadventurous mould ;  
But him, who for the salt sea sold  
His birthright, still the vagrant waves  
In endless vagabondage hold.

Not his the kindly sleep of earth  
Who ever scorned the soil in life :  
Tied to no spot by bairns and wife,  
Sea-called and chosen from his birth,  
He keeps the way of salty strife :

Far from the quiet fields of home  
Where all his folk clod-cumbered lie,  
On tossing crests when winds are high  
His spirit rides through crashing foam  
And whistles to the whistling sky.

## SALLY BLACK AND GEORDIE GREEN

OH, where may you be going with your black mare  
sleeked so shinily,  
With her four hoofs newly-varnished and her feathers  
combed so clean,  
With her mane and tail straw-plaited, pranked so gay  
and smart and nattily  
With red and yellow ribbons tied in lovelocks, Geordie  
Green ?

*I be going to the Fair  
With my mare.*

140 SELECTIONS FROM 'I HEARD A SAILOR'

Then won't you take me with you, for I've never been  
to Stagshaw Bank,  
Nor a hiring nor a hopping, though I'm nearly seven-  
teen,  
And I've never had a fairing, faldalal nor whigmaleerie  
nor  
A red and yellow ribbon for my lovelocks, Geordie  
Green?  
*I can't manage but one mare  
At the Fair.*

Now what can you be fearing, and I but a young lassie,  
too,  
And you, a lad of twenty? But if so it be you're  
mean,  
I've saved up thirteen pennies, so no need to fear I'll  
beggar you  
Or be beholding to you for one farthing, Geordie  
Green.  
*I'll be getting to the Fair  
With my mare.*

Then gan your gait and luck to you at Stagshaw Bank,  
your mare and you;  
But maybe you'll be rueing when you see me like a  
queen  
In Farmer Dodd's new dogcart, with the shafts and  
spokes picked out with red,  
Overtake you on the road there and flash by you,  
Geordie Green.  
*Yet I'll happen reach the Fair  
With my mare.*

## STARS

Who travelling through a midnight wood  
Tilts up his chin to watch the stars  
Will like enough trip over roots  
Or bark his shins against the knars :

But who, benighted in blind ways,  
Struggles to thrust close boughs apart  
Will never win from out the wood  
Unless the stars are in his heart.

## THE RIDER OF THE WHITE HORSE

CLIMBING the bridge's slope, a little lad,  
I looked up and beheld in bright sunlight,  
Against a billowing April cloud, blue-black,  
Heavy with threat of hail, a monster white  
High-stepping steed with rider scarlet-clad  
Like a flame-robed archangel on its back.

The spark-red nostril and the flashing eye,  
The scarlet rider in the sun afire  
Against the storm-cloud—shot with thrilling dread  
My little heart, a-hunger with desire  
Of angel visions : then, as they went by,  
I knew 'twas old Jake Dodd in hunting-red—

Jake Dodd, the whipper-in, on his white Jill.  
The sun was blotted out ; the hail threshed down,  
Scattering the glory. Jake and his old mare  
Have long been dust—yet, on the bridge's crown,  
In the child's heart within my heart, Jake still  
Rides, an archangel burning through the air.



WHERE NEITHER MOTH NOR RUST...

TREASURES three  
Life's given me—

Opal-Heart of dawning dreams  
Shot with restless fiery gleams :

Crystal-Heart by day and night  
Glowing with the living light :

Amber-heart that wells with mirth  
Of the sun-enchanted earth.

Every dawn's a golden key  
To unlock my treasury—  
Heaven here and now for me !

AUDREY

ON the sea's edge she dances—  
Her glistening body bare  
Amid the light foam glances,  
Foam-light with tossing hair,  
Eager for all that chances  
By land or sea or air.

She dances yet undreaming  
Of life's oncoming tide :  
Yet when wild waters streaming  
Surge round her deep and wide  
Her soul foam-light and gleaming  
Shall every danger ride.

## MICHAEL'S SONG

BECAUSE I set no snare  
But leave them flying free,  
All the birds of the air  
Belong to me.

From the bluetit on the sloc  
To the eagle on the height  
Uncaged they come and go  
For my delight.

And so the sunward way  
I soar on the eagle's wings,  
And in my heart all day  
The bluetit sings.

## FROM "A GARLAND FOR JOCELYN"

## II

WHEN I think of you I see  
A flame-winged fritillary  
Glancing over daffodils

When I think of you I hear  
Leaping laughing amber-clear  
Sun-enchanted rills.

## IV

When you dance  
Amber-bright the sunbeams glance  
In your tossing hair ;

So your name  
Calls to mind a little flame  
Dancing in the air—

Little flame for ever dancing  
In the rain-washed air of April,  
Amber flame through crystal glancing.

## v

A charm of goldfinches  
That flutter and flicker  
Over daffodils flashing  
Through sunshiny showers.

The light of your laughter  
Flashes out of the silence,  
Though you have been sleeping  
In dreamland for hours.

## IN COURSE OF TIME

THE sarsen-stone,  
Door-post of temple, altar-throne  
Of some old god, or monument  
Erected by a warrior-host  
To mark the fallen chieftain's tomb,  
In course of time has come  
To serve the old black sow for scratching-post.

A lad's light word,  
Breathed low and scarcely heard  
Or heeded in the babblement  
And blare of other tongues, has time

Remembered, and the souls of men  
Again and yet again  
Take fire at that dead lad's undying rhyme.

## BEAUTY FOR ASHES

You may burn the golden glory of the gorse,  
But the roots into the rocky earth run deep,  
And the living bush will only glow to rarer fire of  
beauty

When at last beneath the mould you lie asleep.

Beauty dies not though you blast and lay it waste,  
Though you turn the whole earth to a cinder heap,  
From the ashes of your factories once again the  
everliving

Shall awake one April morning out of sleep.

## THE PEARL

AND is this all

You bring up from the bottom of the sea ?

I watched you strip and poise and recklessly

Dive headlong down, as though to wrest the key

From the profundity

Of time's unfathomable mystery—

Only a pearl,

A little fragile globe of fleckless white,

You bring up, breathless, in your palm clutched tight,

Trinket to make a girl's eyes kindle bright—

Naught else you bring to light

From the dark chambers of old ocean's night ?

*Only a pearl—*

*All colour fused in one white glow, all sound  
In breathless silence blended, all form bound  
In the clean compass of the perfect round—  
Beauty, in chaos drowned,  
Borne to the living light from deeps profound !*

### NORTHERN SPRING

O SKEIN of wild-geese, flying  
Through April's starry blue,  
Your harsh and eager crying  
Searches through and through  
My heart till it takes flight  
Arrow-like with you  
To pierce the Northern night,  
Shedding flakes of light  
From wings of flashing white  
Through tingling airs a-quiver  
On tossing waves that shiver  
Crystal berg and floe—  
On crashing ghylls and forces of winter's melting snow.

When down the water-courses  
The spate of April dins,  
Like hoofs of countless horses  
Thunder the threshing linns,  
As leaping 'twixt the scars  
Bright froth spurts and spins,  
And sprays the leafing spars  
Of woods that rake the stars ;  
And shattering bonds and bars

My spirit pours in thunder  
Of torrents, trampling under  
Dead winter's slothful dreams,  
Till life's a singing tumult of April-wakened streams.

## OUTWARD BOUND

THE harbour-lights have dwindled  
To sparks on a grey shore  
Which fades into the sunset  
That we shall see no more  
Above our own land kindled.

As one by one extinguished  
The lights of home go out,  
It's time to face the onset  
Of night, to turn about—  
All thoughts of ease relinquished—

To face the whirling welter,  
And drive before the storm  
That knows not dawn nor sunset—  
Our wits to keep us warm,  
And courage our sole shelter.



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